



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

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## **THESIS**

**FAILURE AND SUCCESS OF JIHADI INFORMATION  
OPERATIONS ON THE INTERNET**

by

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December 2013

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**FAILURE AND SUCCESS OF JIHADI INFORMATION OPERATIONS ON THE  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Obscure entities, individuals, and organizations engaged in jihad have made the Internet their most powerful tool for conducting information operations. Internet outlets, especially social networking sites, provide jihadis with access to the whole world. At the same time, the current Internet environment allows sustainable research about the uses of these resources for the cause of jihad, and simultaneously provides new opportunities to counterterrorist agencies.

This thesis proposes an “artisanal” approach to analyze jihadism on the Internet. Specifically, by identifying prominent jihadi leaders’ recommendations on the spread of the call to jihad by fellow jihadis, we set up assumptions on what potentially makes jihadi information operations on social networking sites successful. Sets of data publicly available on the Internet and within the most popular social networking sites are identified and framed in line with the jihadi leadership recommendations. A case study and related data are gathered and analyzed to test these assumptions. The results of the analysis may enable researchers to speed data collection by identifying only potentially successful jihadi presences on the Web, and allow counterterrorist bodies to target jihadi Web spaces efficiently. The thesis also provides a background on jihadi approaches to public relations, an empirical analysis of terrorists’ challenges and counterterrorists opportunities on the Internet, a case study and a methodology for analyzing jihadism on the most visited social networking sites.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION: EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT OF JIHADISM ON THE INTERNET .....</b>	<b>1</b>
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
B.	STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND SCOPE .....	3
C.	LITERATURE REVIEW .....	3
D.	THEORY .....	6
E.	METHODOLOGY .....	7
<b>II.</b>	<b>THE EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNET AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE WEB-BASED JIHAD .....</b>	<b>11</b>
A.	THE PHASES OF THE INTERNET EVOLUTION .....	11
B.	JIHADIS AND THEIR PUBLIC IMAGE.....	12
C.	TERRORISM AS A COMMUNICATION PROCESS.....	15
D.	WEB-BASED JIHADISM IN THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11: OPPORTUNITIES .....	16
E.	WEB-BASED JIHADISM IN THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11: PROBLEMS FROM WITHIN .....	18
F.	WEB-BASED JIHADISM IN THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11: PROBLEMS FROM OUTSIDE.....	23
G.	JIHADISM IN THE TWO EVOLUTIONARY PHASES OF THE INTERNET.....	24
<b>III.</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND LIMITS OF THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY IN COUNTERING TERRORISM ON THE INTERNET .....</b>	<b>33</b>
A.	POSSIBLE SCENARIOS OF INTERNET CONTROL .....	33
B.	THE “NO” CONTROL SCENARIO.....	33
C.	THE “FAIR” CONTROL SCENARIO.....	37
D.	THE “TOTAL” CONTROL SCENARIO.....	40
E.	CONCLUSIONS .....	41
<b>IV.</b>	<b>THE NATURE OF THE JIHADI ENTERPRISE IN THE BALKANS: THE ALBANIAN CASE.....</b>	<b>43</b>
A.	A SHORT BACKGROUND .....	43
B.	THE EMERGENCE OF FOREIGN RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE .....	44
C.	THE CHARITIES NETWORK .....	47
D.	THE ROLE OF FOREIGN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN SUPPORTING TERRORISM IN ALBANIA....	49
E.	THE RELIGIOUS TENSION WITHIN ALBANIA .....	50
F.	PAST TERRORIST THREATS TO ALBANIA .....	51
G.	THE COUNTERTERRORISM ACTIONS OF THE ALBANIAN SECURITY FORCES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS.....	53
H.	JIHADI LEFTOVERS AND POTENTIAL THREATS.....	56

I.	CONCLUSIONS: CHALLENGES FOR THE PRESENT AND FUTURE .....	59
V.	ANALYSIS OF JIHADI INFORMATION OPERATIONS IN THE ALBANIAN LANGUAGE ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES .....	63
A.	PREVIOUS RESEARCH.....	63
B.	ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS IN THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF PROMINENT JIHADIS ON THE USE OF THE INTERNET .....	67
C.	BUILDING AND ANALYZING THE DATASET.....	72
1.	Where To Start?.....	72
2.	Local Language-Driven Research .....	73
3.	A Subject Driven Research .....	75
4.	Creating the Dataset .....	77
a.	<i>Quantity and Outreach</i> .....	78
b.	<i>Networking</i> .....	79
c.	<i>Specific Tailoring</i> .....	80
d.	<i>Audiovisual Exploitation</i> .....	81
D.	RESULTS FROM THE DATASET ANALYSIS .....	82
VI.	COMBINED SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNTERING JIHADI INFORMATION OPERATIONS ON THE INTERNET.....	91
A.	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS .....	91
B.	OPTIONS FOR COUNTERING JIHADI INFORMATION OPERATIONS ON THE INTERNET.....	93
	APPENDIX A .....	97
	APPENDIX B .....	101
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	113
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	127

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Model of how users judge the credibility of online information (from Wathen and Burkell, 2002, p. 141). .....	65
Figure 2.	A screenshot of the search results by using the keyword “xhihad” (Alb.) in YouTube. ....	74
Figure 3.	Visualization obtained through ORA Network Visualizer. The visualization represents the network of interacting users (commenters) and the jihadi information operations which are colored by subject. (Afghanistan/Iraq in grey; general call to jihad in dark purple; jihadi leaders in peach; Syrian conflict in green; and West vs. Islam in yellow). ....	87
Figure 4.	Visualization obtained through ORA Network Visualizer. The triangles (red) represent the jihadi information operations, the squares (by color) the class of topic which they address, and the circles (black) the channel owners. ....	88
Figure 5.	Albania’s score in the TI, CPI 2012. (Transparency International, 2013). ....	98
Figure 6.	GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir’s grid view. The terrorist attacks in Albania, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo, from 1991–2011, extracted from the amount of terrorist attacks that occurred in the Balkan. The attacks that were perpetrated by Islamic-related groups who were identified as attackers have occurred only in Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, and Hungary; nevertheless most of the attackers are not identified properly. See Figure 7 for proper explanation. ....	101
Figure 7.	GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir’s grid view. The terrorist attacks of unidentified perpetrators in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Albania, divided by their affiliation. See Figure 8 for a temporal distribution of the attacks. ....	102
Figure 8.	GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir’s Timeline view. The terrorist attacks occurred in Albania from 1990–2011. The peak coincides with the year 1997, when Albania faced civil disorders due to Ponzi scheme failures. ....	102
Figure 9.	GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir’s Timeline view. The terrorist attacks occurred in Kosovo from 1990–2011. The peak coincides with the years 1999–2001, when the Kosovo Albanian started the war against Serbian authorities requesting independence. Although a United Nations-mandated international military contingent occupied the strategic areas, since June 1999 after Serbian Army retreated from the province, in attempt to establish a buffer zone between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians, the attacks continued by ethnic paramilitary groups of both sides. ....	103
Figure 10.	GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir’s Timeline view. The terrorist attacks occurred in Bosnia from 1990–2011. The peak coincides with the years 1992–1998, a period of high tension within the country due	

	to political disagreements and ethnic clashes, despite the war being officially over since 1995, after the signing of the Dayton accords. ....	103
Figure 11.	GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir's Timeline view. The terrorist attacks occurred in Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia from 1990–2011.....	104
Figure 12.	Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's link analysis tool, Auto view. The Balkans Islamic-oriented organization's network, 1992–2004.....	104
Figure 13.	Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's Social Network Analysis Tool. The centralities of the ten most central Islamic-related organizations in the Balkans. ....	105
Figure 14.	Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's link analysis tool, Auto view. The Balkans Islamic-oriented NGOs, charities, and globally recognized terrorist organizations' network, 1992–2004. See Figure 15 for further explanation on links. ....	106
Figure 15.	Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's link analysis tool, Histogram. The Balkans Islamic-oriented NGOs, charities, and globally recognized terrorist organizations's network, 1992–2004. The numbers following the entities show the number of links within the network. ....	107
Figure 16.	Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's link analysis tool, Auto view. The Balkans Islamic-oriented NGOs and charities network, 1992–2004. See Figure 17 for the importance of each in terms of centrality within the network. ....	108
Figure 17.	Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's link analysis tool, Auto view, and Search Around. The Islamic-related entities, and events in Albania, Bosnia, and Kosovo, 1992–2012. At the top are the Islamic-related organizations, while on the flanks can be found entities connected directly to them. The Search Around feature of Palantir enables phased research. From top to bottom (flanks) are entities connected sequentially with each other. At the bottom there is the same representation, including the events in which the entities are involved. ....	110
Figure 18.	GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir's Map, using the Heatmap Density Tool, with a Radius of 15 km and Area Unit 1 km <sup>2</sup> . The terrorist attacks occurred in Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia from 1990–2011. Note highest density hotspots in Bosnia coincide with the AOR of foreign Islamic paramilitary forces, Zenica in central Bosnia, and Moaca Gornja in the Northeast of the country.....	111

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Terrorists, the government, and the media (from Combs, 2006, p. 169).....	17
Table 2.	Measurement data of jihadi recommended elements for success of jihadi information operations. ....	70
Table 3.	The five most popular (in terms of number of views and number of views/day) jihadi information operations from the dataset.....	83
Table 4.	Statistics on religion in Balkan countries.....	97
Table 5.	The South East Europe (SEE) countries Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2012. In the global chart Denmark was positioned first with 90 points and Somalia as last with 174 points (from Transparency International, 2013).....	97
Table 6.	Islamic organizations in Albania linked with terrorism (from Kullolli, 2009) .....	99
Table 7.	Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's Social Network Analysis Tool. The centralities of the five most central Islamic NGOs and charities in the Balkans, 1992–2004. ....	109

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AF	Al Furqan
AHF	Al Haramain Foundation
AMC	Albanian Muslim Community
BIF	Benevolence International Foundation
DP	Democratic Party (Albania)
EIG	Egyptioan Islamic Group
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
GIA	Algerian Islamic Armed Group
GIMF	Global Islamic Media Front
GRF	Global Relief Fund
IIRO	International Islamic Relief Agency (aka IGASA)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NIS	National Information Service (Albania)
RIHS	Revival of Islamic Heritage Society
SJRCK	Saudi Joint Relief Committee for Kosovo
SNA	Social Network Analysis
TI	Taibah International
TWRA	Third World Relief Agency
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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I would like to dedicate this work to the woman who keeps my heart warm and my brain cold, my dear wife, Alba.

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# **I. INTRODUCTION: EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT OF JIHADISM ON THE INTERNET**

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

It is globally accepted that terrorists in general and jihadists in particular use the Internet as their main propaganda tool. This assertion is not difficult to prove, since anyone with a computer and an Internet connection can run a search and find himself flooded with jihadi related materials. The quantity and quality of the uploaded information by jihadists has evolved with the development of the Internet. In the early 2000s, after the invasion of Afghanistan by U.S. and coalition forces, al Qaeda's information operations went entirely online, due to the pressure and physical dangers of the real world. Jihadist propaganda was mainly conducted through traditional Web pages, and communications were mostly conducted through mailing lists. The jihadist narrative was preserved and controlled through a centralized virtual infrastructure. Despite the unlimited spread of these websites, due to the nondiscriminatory nature of the Internet, conducting an effective propaganda campaign was still difficult. First, websites needed publicity, and when they achieved high visibility, these websites incurred the risk of being shut down by security agencies. Second, due to technological requisites, a jihadi Web manager needed funds to keep the website running and also advanced technical capabilities to cover his virtual activity. The situation changed drastically with the advance of the Web virtual infrastructure and the emergence of a new sort of Internet product, the social networking sites.

A few years after terrorists had to transfer their propaganda efforts to the Web, they also needed to change their strategies. Conway (2012) recalling the al Qaeda case, gives two reasons for the change. The first was the impossibility of al-Qaeda's centralized structure to exercise control over the jihadist narrative. An important event illustrating this problem was the appearance of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi on the Web with his famous videos, including one in which he decapitated the American journalist Nicholas Berg (Conway, 2012, p. 13). A second reason lies in technological development and the emergence of new social networking platforms on the Internet landscape, such as

Facebook, in 2004, and You Tube, in 2005 (p. 14) that diversified the ways of transmission and representation of the information. Social networking sites not only provided a cheaper and easier way to spread jihadi content online, but also enabled jihadists to work with their public directly, in real time, if necessary. Now, a few years later, the terrorists have perfectly adapted themselves to that environment. Ressa (2012, p. 7) maintains that despite the failure on the ground, al Qaeda's ideology is spreading virulently in the virtual world, and the social media is the new battlefield. Also their strategies have changed significantly. Forster (2012) indicates that "jihadists have shifted from being consumers of information to "networked participants" (p. 29). Further on, he maintains that "virtual networks, and associated media allow information to be shared quickly and permit active participation that enhances learning, cooperation, and innovation, thus enabling small groups and even individuals to accomplish big things."

But, what do these developments mean? From one perspective, it might be suggested that, given the new opportunities the jihadi cause will successfully achieve its objectives. Still, a decade after the emergence of the social networking sites and the increase in the world population's access to the Internet, there has been no significant achievement of the jihad<sup>1</sup>, as it was professed by Osama bin Laden and his followers in the late 1990s. This does not mean that jihadi information strategies have failed, or that the overall success of the jihad is determined solely by the success or failure of jihadist propaganda on the Web. It simply means that there are factors that limit the success of jihadist information on the Web, despite the emergence of new technological tools and virtual spaces, and there are factors that achieve jihadi goals in matters of Web-based propaganda.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless noted otherwise, in this work the word "jihad" refers to the violent or non-violent struggle of individuals associated with al Qaeda or its proxies around the world, or relative sympathizers, attempting to realize and promote the objectives mentioned by Osama bin Laden in his declarations in 1996 in the "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places" and in 1998 in the "World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders."

## **B. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

The objective of this thesis is to determine the factors that contribute to the success and failure of jihadist information operations and strategies in the contemporary Internet environment. The thesis faces a well-known problem, which consists of the impossibility of providing a contained and representative statistical sample of the environment that has to be studied. The features of the Internet along with the spread of jihadist Web-content on the Web makes it extremely difficult to study a representative sample of jihadist information operations and then submit it to qualitative and, especially, quantitative analysis. In this thesis we try to overcome this problem by selecting a contained sample, which is provided by depicting characteristics of jihadi information operations developed for a specific audience, the Albanian language speakers. The singularity of the Albanian language merges the perpetrators with the perpetrated audience, and provides a well-contained sample in analyzing characteristics of jihadi information operations on social networking sites. Through the collection and analysis of jihadi information content and networks developed within the Internet we will identify factors of success and failure of jihadist information operations on the Internet, and especially in the social networking sites. The methodology offered through this thesis may also provide an analytical model for understanding the jihadist Web-based propaganda, conducting research, and countering jihadist enterprises in this environment by exploiting opportunities presented to counter terrorist forces.

## **C. LITERATURE REVIEW**

There have been several attempts to study jihadist Internet strategies<sup>2</sup> and there is a lot of research going on for providing security agencies with technological products that make data from social networking sites easier to analyze. Given the difficulty of extracting representative samples or analyzing the whole Web in order to analyze the effectiveness of jihadist propaganda, most of the studies conducted have a descriptive

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<sup>2</sup> The term Jihadi Internet strategies, in this study, stands for the organized efforts to conduct operations in order to achieve the objectives of the jihad. Further on, jihadi information operations will stand for the combination of means and resources offered by the Internet to forward to the public the messages in accordance with the jihadi narratives.

profile rather than an analytical one. Bunt (2003) underlines the difficulties in determining location and timing of the upload of online information by users, and the global dimension of propagation of information and introduces the term e-jihad for describing the jihadist Web-based information flow (pp. 25–28). Despite the difficulties there are some attempts that offer some logical explanations supported by limited data sets.

Janbeck and Prado (2012) conducted research between 2009 and 2010 in an attempt to analyze the discursive strategies and representations of virtual communities of a few dozen terrorist-related websites. They agreed with the general assertion that the Internet is used by terrorists to disseminate propaganda, organize the membership, communicate information, fundraise, and recruit new members (p. 23), and provide documented argumentation of that. Despite the limited number of websites they analyzed, they noted that none of these websites offered interactive content, such as chat rooms, forums, etc. They explained this lack of service as a cautious choice by terrorists, in order to maintain tight control of the discourse over the Web. Nonetheless, the websites were interconnected with other similar content websites (p. 24). The research conducted by Janbeck and Prado (2012) is a model that offers insights within a restricted area. Although they analyzed only websites, and not any other Internet sources or platforms, their format may be used for analyzing also social networking site profiles or pages.

Another way of conducting social networking analysis is proposed by Weisburd (2012), who proposes an “artisanal approach” model. His artisanal approach consists of an individual approach to track and analyze the imprint of suspected terrorists in social networking sites, without any specific agenda, just willingness to follow any traces of suspected profiles. However, he limits the effectiveness of this approach solely to individuals who may alert investigators by explicitly showing online the extremist side of their identity, or by being members of dark networks on the Web.

Everton (2012) recognizes the emergent importance of social media and the potential of a proper study of them (p. 70) while assessing that the techniques of collection and processing of data are in their infancy (p.71). In fact, the tools available for the study of social networking sites consist of computer programs able to track, collect,

and process the data gathered through social networking sites or through the Web. These programs enable researchers or investigators to find and structure data, but do not provide further qualitative analysis, which is left to the human operator. The data structuring and the resulting analysis itself is also dependent on human assumptions, which are often based on factors deriving from incomplete researches on the jihadis' use of the Internet also, another risk of automatic collection and data-structuring programs may be the leaving behind of important information. Despite that, raw data needs explanations and proper coding. Following the collection of data and the structuring of it, the biggest problem for the human operator is to give them the meaning that they have in the real world.

To date, there is no method or data-driven approach to determine why some jihadist information operations are successful and others are not. This thesis overcomes this problem by depicting a specific sample within the jihadist information operations. The sample will consist of jihadist information operations in social networking sites in the Albanian language. The Albanian language is a quite old and unique language that is spoken by the Albanian population in Albania, Kosovo, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Montenegro, or by Albanian populations living in other countries. Albanians have an interesting relation with religion and especially with Islam. It is reported that roughly 60% of the population is Muslim, but the “mosquegoers” and practicing believers are only a small minority of the Albanian population in Albania. In Kosovo, FYROM, and Montenegro the situation is different, both quantitatively and qualitatively, since religion has been an important part of the Albanian ethnic group in those countries, and the practicing of Islam is more relevant among the population. Since the fall of communism, the entire region has been under constant radical Islamic and jihadist propaganda, which is being transmitted mostly through the Internet. Despite a few cases when jihadi activists on the Web have been detected and indicted by security forces, still there is a strong presence of radical Islamist content on the Web, with a higher concentration in social networking sites. The language serves as a useful limiting factor (Sageman, 2004, p. 162) in building a consistent sample of jihadist propaganda, and it is quite easy to be searched and tracked in the social networking sites. After

building a dataset from the analysis of the jihadi content in Albania(n), we will use descriptive statistics, social network analysis, and visual analytics techniques to determine factors that contribute to the success or failure of jihadist information operations.

#### **D. THEORY**

Evaluating the success of jihadi information operations on the Internet and specifically on social networking sites is not an easy task. Previous (and partial) approaches to this problem have consisted of attempts to give answers to questions such as: How are they conducted? How do they exploit the Internet? What is their role in terrorist activities? (Janbeck and Prado, 2012). Other approaches are related to finding ways of getting information about these operations (Everton, 2012), or even monitoring these operations for obtaining information about previous, ongoing, or future terrorist activities (Weisburd, 2012). Most of the literature on jihadi information operations on the Internet and their exploitation for the disruption of terrorist networks is related to one of the mentioned approaches, while there is no significant study that adopts an exhaustive analytic approach in answering the questions: Why do some of them succeed, and why do some others fail? We will use four indicators or elements for evaluating the success (and failure) of jihadi information operations on the Internet. These elements are built upon the recommendations of prominent jihadi leaders on how to exploit the media to advance the goals of the jihad.

The first element consists in guaranteeing the issuing of jihadi communications on multiple occasions and also ensuring that the message reaches wide audiences. The concept behind this element can be noticed in the recommendations of every prominent jihadi ideologue. If jihadi information operations are repeated and they reach a large audience, the chances of influencing individuals toward joining the jihad or supporting the cause increase, and thus the jihadi information operations achieve success.



The second element consists in making the jihadi information operations a networked effort. Prominent jihadis recommend that the spread of the call to jihad should be a common effort and each Muslim should contribute individually. In this case, if jihadi information operations are supported by various entities the chances for success increase; thus, the operations achieve success.

The third element consists of tailoring jihadi information operations to meet the expectations of the specific audience. If jihadi information operations take into account a local audience's narratives and characteristics, and they are tailored to include as little information that is extraneous to that audience as possible, the chances to achieve success increase.

The fourth element consists of the exploitation of the opportunities offered by Web media in terms of audiovisual manipulation of messages. If jihadi information operations are forwarded to the audience through high quality media productions, guaranteeing that both the voice and images of the message are delivered at their best, they would increase their chances of success.

These elements, in this form, may provide researchers and analysts with a theoretical explanation of the factors of success of jihadi information operations, but in order to be used for analytical purposes they need to be operationalized. The operationalization of these elements is done through a process that takes into account the current developments and opportunities offered by the Internet.

## **E. METHODOLOGY**

While there are several authors who have conducted research on the operational use of the Internet by jihadist users, there is no significant study that approaches a quantitative manner for answering the following questions: Why do some information operations on the Internet succeed, and why do some others fail? Which jihadi information operations have potential for success? What plays a role in their success or failure? This lack of research is connected to the difficulties of extracting a contained sample from the Internet. We plan to overcome this problem by analyzing jihadi Internet information operations in the Albanian language. The Albanian language acts as a strong

limiting factor in influencing the Albanian population, and all the jihadi content in Albanian on the Internet aims exclusively to influence this population, since there is no other nation or community of people in the world that speaks and understands it. So, the first step to answer the research question posed in this thesis lies in fixing the problem of the identification of the research sample. The most important question that arises regards the feasibility of the claim: Is the Albanian case feasible? Evidence on the jihadi “enterprise” in Albania, Kosovo, and FYROM, where most of the ethnic Albanian population lives, is used to answer this question. The physical presence of jihadist activities in the region, despite the lack of any substantial or large-scale attacks, further supports the claim that the Albanian case can provide us with an effective research sample.

Further on, the other issue that will be addressed consists of explaining the nexus between the jihad-”on the ground” and the jihad-”on the Web” operations. The question to be asked is put as follows: Should the jihadi-related content on the Web be considered part of the “real” jihad? In answering this question evidence collected from sources throughout the bibliography, and most important, from the publicly available scriptures of well-known jihadis, are used. In addition, we analyze the viewpoints of prominent jihadis regarding the necessity to spread information about the jihad, and also their relative recommendations on how do that successfully. The most important source, though, would be the writings of Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, the al Qaeda strategist, who has contributed on these matters in his “Call to Global Islamic Resistance” (Lacey, 2008). Al-Suri was apprehended in late 2005, so his guidelines are related to that stage of development of Internet technology and infrastructure, but that does not mean they are not relevant, since other jihadis have picked his idea up and elaborated on them further.

The other issue considered in this study is related to the opportunities and challenges of the Internet, as the ultimate playground of jihadis, but also a fertile field for counterterrorist subjects. From 2005 to the present date the Internet infrastructure, and its public usage, have changed immensely, and the emergence of social networking sites has also definitely changed how these opposing parties interact with it.

Still, the theoretical assumptions of the success and failure of jihadist information operations on the Internet cannot fulfill the research objectives. Therefore, the next step is to analyze the “sample.” For this step, data is collected by running searches with keywords and following links that lead to jihadi content “Webspaces” and building a dataset. This kind of research follows the model proposed by Weisburd (2012). The search is run on the biggest social networking sites that are used in Albania. As found in Alexa, the leading provider of free Web metrics, the most visited social networking sites in Albania are Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The research approaches Facebook and YouTube, while the data is going to be collected from the later.

After identifying and collecting the data we structure them in standardized spreadsheets in order to use them for further analysis. The data sets are coded as per the social networking sites available information, including: links, usernames, number of viewers, number of responses and responders’ usernames, likes, number of videos, time of upload, threads, articles, etc. Since the Albanian language is made of only two major dialects, which are used in different geographical areas of the country and the region, we also identify and collect information regarding which dialect is used by the users, and conduct geo-spatial analysis as well when possible. The data collected through the research is submitted to a semantic analysis in order to confront the data quantitatively with the major objectives promoted by notorious jihadists, such as bin Laden, al-Suri, and others.

The buildup of the dataset will enable statistical analysis, regression analysis, and basic social network analysis.

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## **II. THE EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNET AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE WEB-BASED JIHAD**

“Abuthaabit: This media work, I am telling you, is very important. Very, very, very, very.”

“Irhabi007: I know, I know.”

“Abuthaabit: Because a lot of the funds brothers are getting is because they are seeing stuff like this coming out. Imagine how many people have gone (to Iraq) after seeing the situation because of the videos. Imagine how many of them could have been shaheed as well.”

—Extract from an interdicted communication between an anonymous cyber-jihadis, Abuthaabit, and the Englishman, Younis Tsouli, Irhabi007, one of the most prolific cyber-jihadists until being arrested by the British police forces in November 2006 (*The Economist*, 2007).

### **A. THE PHASES OF THE INTERNET EVOLUTION**

The Internet provides a meaningful number of opportunities for exploiting its applications to the user's benefit. From its emergence to the present the Internet has changed drastically. Its evolution is divided in two main subsequent phases. The first, which may be called the phase of the “traditional Internet,” includes the period from the start of the use of the Internet by the wider public until the year 2005, when the first social networking sites appeared. The second phase will include the “modern Internet” and includes the period from 2005 to the present. A common pattern that characterizes both phases is the increasing number of Internet users, while a distinguishing characteristic is the way in which the Internet users can use it. In the phase of the traditional Internet the ways in which the Internet users approached the Web were limited to simple actions, mainly through the passive use of its applications, such as surfing the Web, emailing, or exchanging viewpoints through simply built forums. Since 2005, with the appearance of YouTube, and later on of Facebook, and other more recent applications, the users could significantly change the way they made use of the Internet. Beside the traditional uses, the modern Internet users can communicate more easily in

different ways that include audio-visual improvements, networking, and user-built websites. Users can access and use these features which are free and do not require any particular skill. The modern phase is also characterized by an exponential increase in the number of Internet users, given the global technological advancement. The global Internet penetration in 2012 was nearly 35% of the world population, while there is a large variation in the penetration range between regions of the world. In the second phase, even remote areas of the world, that were previously excluded from the Internet benefits, are now connected into the Web.

## **B. JIHADIS AND THEIR PUBLIC IMAGE**

Two of the main characteristics of the Internet are its lack of barriers and speed of communication and the high level of anonymity that it provides to the general user. These characteristics have made the Internet a preferred tool for Islamist terrorists. There is extensive literature on the uses of the Internet by terrorists. As Weimann<sup>3</sup> (2006) puts it, terrorists may use the Web in two ways: first, as a communication tool between themselves and potential supporters to spread information, propaganda, instructions, in other words as an information network; second, as a virtual battlefield, engaging in what is known as cyber-terrorism (p. 25). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2012) identifies six different categories of activities for which the terrorists use Internet: propaganda, financing, training, planning, execution, and cyber attacks (p. 3). Weimann and Von Knop (2007) go into more detail and list the following activities: psychological warfare, online indoctrination, recruitment and mobilization, planning and coordination, fund-raising, data mining, and disinformation (p. 886).

This study considers these activities from a general perspective, with the purpose of noticing the differences over time rather than analyzing each case thoroughly.

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<sup>3</sup> Weimann (2009) also reports that the Internet is also used to conduct ideological debates and various disputes within jihadis or other Islamist organizations. (p. 49) He brings different examples such as the critiques between al Qaeda vs. Hamas, al Qaeda vs. Hezbollah, and Sunnis vs. Shi'as, debates within those groups, or even personal disputes between the jihadi leadership. (p. 50–72)

In showing the evolution of the terrorist's use of the Internet over time, and especially through the two phases mentioned above, it is fundamental to identify the reasons behind the instauration of the strong relationship between terrorists and the Internet.

Throughout modern history, terrorist groups have resorted to terrorism from a position of weakness in front of their enemies. To succeed in their struggle, terrorists need publicity. Juergensmeyer (2000) maintains that terrorism is strongly connected with the publicity it generates, and that without it, terrorism would cease to exist (p. 139). The need for (positive) publicity makes terrorists choose their targets carefully. The target to be attacked is determined by the amount of publicity it would attract, not its intrinsic value. Symbolism is more appealing than the direct effect. In this way, terrorist attacks fit the media needs for sparkling audiovisual services, and also attract sympathizers to the terrorist's cause (Kepel and Milelli, 2005, p. 29). The terrorists' success is not only defined in matters of political achievements against the government or governments in the case of international terrorist groups, but also in terms of recruiting and logistical support, which are strongly connected with the publicity that surrounds the terrorist group. Referring to the case of Al Qaeda, Kepel and Milelli express that it exists only in a "cathode mode," and that all its operations are dependent on the media space that the group can occupy and especially the type of media that offers more spectacle. From this perspective the technological development and especially the modernization of the media environment in the world have helped bin Laden's initiative succeed, to the degree that it was dependent on the publicity. Given the poor Internet expansion in bin Laden's initial "area of responsibility," the Arabic peninsula and to a lesser extent the whole Islamic world, his main source of publicity was the Arabic and international television channels. The emergence and the sooner dominance of the Arab transnational media, led by Al Jazeera, in the Arabic peninsula gave a powerful impetus to the jihad, in the way it was advanced by Al Qaeda. The jihadist terrorist organization was eager to integrate itself with the new media (p. 27). In regard to bin Laden's videotapes aired by TV stations, Tuman (2003) expresses "the bin Laden tapes, while shot in a style suggesting an amateur working with a simple video camera, were actually fairly sophisticated rhetorical

artifacts” (p. 137). After the terrorist attacks in Kenya and Tanzania, Bin Laden himself was particularly cautious with his media profile.

Bin Laden invented a policy tailored to video clips and ads; brief speeches that were easily incorporated into prime-time news; carefully designed, simple settings; and straightforward speeches, devoid of affectation or sophistication. (Tuman, 2003, p. 28)

The public was appealed to for the whole jihadi struggle from a central point, which was bin Laden. In his short appearances, Bin Laden himself looks more like an object for display, a man of few words, but appealing to the masses. The CNN journalist, Peter Bergen (2001), who interviewed bin Laden in the late 1990s, recalls the caution of bin Laden during the interview. In a less personal environment, Al Qaeda’s practice of releasing videos of bin Laden, first to Al Jazeera, to have them aired and later to be retransmitted from other Western stations, is explained by a careful management of the media profile of the organization leader but also of the organization itself. The bin Laden terrorist attacks were arranged to exploit the media opportunities fully. They were attempting to trigger the “mechanical cause-and-effect cycle of attack,” (p. 28) which was professed by Carlos Marighella. As Kepel and Milelli (2005) maintain further on:

Bin Laden’s movement used some of these (Marighella’s) themes, but did not make them its main motive. It (Bin Laden’s way of doing things) was based not on a particular strategy that adherents worked hard to follow, but on a specific relationship with the media. This was imposed in part by its way of functioning, its targets, and its scope. (p. 28)

Al Qaeda wanted to be sure that the Arab public was going to see the video message, then any other public of the world (Tuman, 2003, p. 140), since its narrative was concentrated mostly on the Arabic peninsula, and also logistical support and recruits originated from the area, despite the primary enemy being the Western governments, especially the United States. The message contained, even though appealing to Westerners, was to be shown at first to the Easterners.



### **C.     TERRORISM AS A COMMUNICATION PROCESS**

Tuman (2003) analyzes terrorism as a communication process, which involves the terrorists, as senders, and the target audience, as receivers. The act of terrorism, more than that the message encoded with it, is the message sent from terrorists to the target audience. Tuman maintains that the target audience decodes the message by relying upon the methods and tools it has for constructing its own sense of reality (p. 18). The target audience determines also the choice of the media used for the propagation of the message by the terrorists. In the case of Al Qaeda, throughout the 1990s until 2001, the TV channels were the main channels of communication between the organization and the public. The call for jihad was especially appealing to the youth, who are characteristically attracted by the flamboyant and inspiring images rather than the ideological content of Al Qaeda's jihad. Al Qaeda "used abundant audiovisual, as opposed to ideological references, which have an impact on a young Arab audience that owes its education to television rather than to the crumbling educational system" (Kepel and Milelli, 2005, p. 29). The observations on the exploitation of audio-visual effects to report the jihadist activities for propaganda purposes are valuable also for the later exploitation of Internet space by Al Qaeda.

Still, during this period there is no significant presence of the jihadist on the Web, and the number of jihadi websites amounts to only a dozen by the end of the 1990s. The lack of significant presence on the Internet by Al Qaeda was due, first, to the lack of its target public on this platform, and second, because of its relative freedom to make use of the traditional media, which did fill further empty spaces, left by the TV channels. Along with TV appearances the jihadi enterprise also used to publish magazines or leaflets that were distributed in printed editions (Awan, 2011).

#### **D. WEB-BASED JIHADISM IN THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11: OPPORTUNITIES**

The 9/11 attacks on U.S. soil would change dramatically how Al Qaeda managed to communicate its messages, not only between itself and the wider public, but also within the organization. The change did not make Al Qaeda stop sending videocassettes or compact diskettes to Arab TV, but it made the organization meet the Internet in the widest way and shortest time possible. Bunt (2003) gives a definition of the use of the Internet by Islamist users and the environment that they create in the Web. “Cyber Islamic Environments have the potential to transform aspects of religious understanding and expression within Muslim contexts, and the power to enable elements within Muslim populations in minority and majority arenas to dialogue (not necessary amicably) with each other” (p. 4).

After the invasion of Afghanistan by U.S. and coalition forces, al Qaeda’s information operations went almost entirely online, due to the military pressure and attendant physical dangers. The only exclusions were the occasional distribution of videocassettes to Arab TV, but they only showed the Al Qaeda leadership, in a type of “show-the-flag” manner rather than spreading strategic propaganda, which started to flow quite freely on the Web. It is important to recognize that the meeting between terrorists and the Internet, in the case of Al Qaeda was more forced and spontaneous rather than natural or well planned by the jihadi leadership. Sageman (2008) also defines the interaction between terrorists and the Internet as a spontaneous one, caused by the simultaneous growth of the Internet and the physical pressure of governmental forces in the real world toward terrorist groups or individuals (p. 110). Sageman would recognize two roles that are played by the Internet in terrorism. The first, which is the passive role, makes the Internet a provider of information related to terrorism. This first role of the Internet is similar to the role the traditional media played or continued to play after the 9/11. The second role of the Internet was the active role, which consisted of making the Internet a system of communication between individuals and between individuals and groups. Sageman identifies the second role of the Internet as revolutionary (p. 114).

By embracing the Internet for their information operations the jihadis overcame a few problems but they started to face others. The first problem they had to overcome is related to their quite secure operational environment, compared to that of an open information campaign on the ground. The second problem they had to overcome is the break of their ties with the traditional media. Combs identifies the goals of the terrorists in relation to the media, the government in relation to the media, and the media itself in relation to terrorism (Table 1). The relationships are based on interdependency, and it can be maintained that this type of traditional approach may not fulfill in full the terrorists' informational objectives.

<b>Terrorist goals and the media</b>	<b>Government goals and the media</b>	<b>Media goals related to terrorism</b>
Use the media to acquire "free" publicity.	Gain publicity to government efforts against terrorists.	Get a scoop.
Media reports that offer a favorable understanding of the terrorist cause.	Make the media focus on the designation of terrorists as "the bad boys."	Present the news dramatically and timely.
Gain legitimacy and identity through the media reports.	Deny terrorists a platform through the media.	Protect the right of the people to get informed.
Generating a sense of unrest through media information dissemination.	Make the media share the information and cooperate with the government.	Secure its employees.

Table 1. Terrorists, the government, and the media (from Combs, 2006, p. 169).

From another perspective about the terrorist approach toward the Internet, given the absence of any censure, relative higher security, and the timesaving, comes to be more useful to the terrorists' needs. At the same time, the traditional media can only publicize only a few types of messages, and not become an informational outlet for recruiting, indoctrination or fundraising, such as the Internet does.

#### **E. WEB-BASED JIHADISM IN THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11: PROBLEMS FROM WITHIN**

Beside the benefits from the new interaction, the jihadi enterprise faced problems related to the management of the jihadi information campaign on the Web, and also with security-related issues.

With regard to management problems, the jihadi style of conducting information operations did not fit entirely with the reality faced on the Internet. The high leadership of Al Qaeda was not prepared for the hierarchy-less model of operation on the Internet. Both bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri, the leaders of the jihad movement, believed in a centralized management of the information struggle. Kepel and Milelli (2005) maintain that bin Laden's plan when he created the World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders, on February 23, 1998, was to exploit the absence of a central power in Afghanistan and organize dispersed jihadists in a single coalition (p. 22). Also his way of exposing himself to the traditional media suggests that the uncontrolled spread of jihadi information on the Internet was not his style of operation. Ayman al-Zawahiri in his "Knights under the Prophet's banner" (Kepel and Milelli, 2005, pp. 193–205) expresses, "The jihad movement must dedicate itself to working with the masses, preaching in the community, providing services to the Muslim people, and sharing their concerns through all available avenues for charity and educational work." Further on he maintains, "The jihad movement must enter the battle in midst of the community and lead it to the battlefield. It must guard against isolating itself from its community in an elitist battle against the authorities" (p.196). Zawahiri recognizes cases when the jihad movement has failed to communicate clearly with the public, and he believes that the Muslims are going to join the jihad movement only if the mujahedeen's slogans are comprehensible (p. 197). In matters of achieving the support of masses in waging jihad, Al-Zawahiri recognizes three important elements that are necessary: a leadership that they can trust, follow, and understand; a clear enemy to strike at; and courage and willingness.

We must communicate our message to the masses and break the media embargo imposed on the jihad movement. (p. 204)

Al-Zawahiri's thought on the model to follow in waging jihad is clearly centralized and hierarchical. Sageman (2008) maintains that "the Internet egalitarianism undermined the hierarchy of traditional terrorist organizations" (p. 118). He writes:

Traditional leaders can post suggestions in chat rooms, but it is up to the followers to pick and choose among them and follow whatever they like. In this sense, it is similar to a marketplace of ideas. The leaders have no way of enforcing their commands on the Internet, as would have been the case in offline organizations, through incentives like funding or intimidation. (p. 120)

Also the Ayatollah Khomeini, from a Shia perspective, professes the centralized model of organizing jihad. Khomeini (in Salemsen, 1985) indicates that the propaganda for Islamic purposes shall be organized through a centralized organization:

Once a few people sit down together, think matters out together, make decisions, it follows that propaganda will emerge. Then little by little others who think the same way are attracted to the group and it increases in size. (p. 20)

The centralized model sustained by the elder jihadis is challenged by the younger generation of jihadi ideologues. Abu Mus'ab al-Suri<sup>4</sup> makes the main critique to the centralized model, and introduces what has taken the name of "leaderless jihad." Al-Suri in his Call to Global Islamic Resistance (in Lacey, 2008) recognizes as fundamental the role of indoctrination and awareness within the Muslim community in order to succeed in the jihad. The indoctrination and awareness building shall not follow under a centralized campaign. He maintains that "the armed jihad does not arise from vacuum and will not transform into the desired magnitude until a revolutionary jihadist climate exists to give rise to it" (p. 6). In order to create the jihadist climate, the jihadists must rely on nonfighting fields, such as the dissemination of ideas and creeds through media and traditional places of gathering such as mosques, schools, etc. (p. 7). He delineates three levels of personal resistance that any Muslim should go through in order to join the jihad movement: first, the Islamic religious sentiment, connected with natural reactions over injustice; second, the will to fight, which is formed after the individual is informed about

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<sup>4</sup> His real name is Mustafa bin Abd al-Qadir Setmariam Nasar. He is also known as Umar Abd al-Hakim. Abu-Mus'ab al-Suri, according to Brachman (2006), is the chief architect of the jihadism over the Internet (p. 159).

destructiveness caused by the enemy; and third, the jihadist creed, which is aroused only through proper education and instruction, before the individual joins the movement (p. 8).

In relation to the media exploitation and the incitement to join the jihad Al-Suri (in Lacey, 2008) provides detailed recommendations with the purpose of encouraging creativity in their free propagation. He suggests that the style of the jihadis' message should be "lucid, streamlined, cogent, passionate and inspiring, to combine not only the promise of victory and rewards but also Allah's beneficence and grace for attempting to face foreign enemies and his retribution for dereliction and delinquency" (p. 191). Al-Suri, puts an emphasis on Internet exploitation and identifies it as a "powerful engine for communicating with the public at large" (p.192). The Internet, to Al-Suri, is also an inexpensive tool, which may overcome the difficulties associated with the spread of the call for jihad by traditional media.

Al-Suri, in making his recommendations in regard to the building of messages, mentions the necessity of tailoring the content of the message to the right caste of the society at which it is directed (p. 192). In addition to these fundamental recommendations he provides a list of possible inspiring topics, which may serve as grassroots to the jihadi movement call. The topics suggested by Al-Suri are: the Qur'anic textual material that brings to the fore the theme of combat and jihad, the body of *fatwas* that deal with the religious obligation to jihad and the self-defense clauses, narratives from the Prophet's biography, provocative war stories of the past that incite jihad, emphasizing the Crusade expeditions and identifying similarities with the actual situation, the Muslim reaction to the Crusades and the destruction brought by the crusaders, emphasizing the modern-day conspiracies against the Islamic world, highlighting the role of current colonization helped by members of the Islamic world, highlighting the Jewish-Zionist actions toward Muslims in Palestine, highlighting the American actions toward Muslims, emphasize the role of martyrs, publication of all literature related to resistance, etc. He directly suggests the use of the Internet for the dissemination of these messages, but does not limit the recommendations only to the dissemination for the persuasion of Muslims to join the jihad movement, but also calls for the use of Internet to reach enemies and threaten them

by using it. Further on he recommends, for the preservation of secrecy and security, using the Internet (pp. 192–196).

Al-Suri is the most prolific jihadi ideologue in matters of jihadi propaganda and information operations, although as Hegghammer notes (2013), his works appear on jihadi forums on the Internet less often than the writings of other jihadists who are not as prolific as he is on jihadi operations. Still, he remains the source of the only well-structured project on how to conduct the leaderless jihad. Al-Suri advocates for the restructuring of jihadi groups, from the centralized structure of the tanzimat, to decentralized self-sufficient cells acting independently. In this way, the jihad would be held by “phantom organizations” (Lia, 2008, p. 6). In his words, warfare must be conducted under the basic operating system and slogan: “system, not organization” (Al-Suri, n.d.). The structure behind this idea is composed of three departments operating in accordance but without any control from each other. The first department, or the “Central Detachment,” is composed by the individual leading the battle in the fronts of war. The second department, or the “Non-central Detachments,” is a form of structure composed by individuals who are assigned to leave the Central Detachment in order to spread in their relative countries and educate secretly recruits for the jihad. The third department, or the “Common Detachments of the Global Islamic Resistance Call,” is a form of structure composed by enthusiastic youths who join the jihad and promote it to others. Al-Suri recognizes that the conditions are not met for the establishment of effective Common Detachments by the direct oversight of the first two detachments, due to the pressure on the ground. He calls for organizing efforts into the establishment and operationalization of the first two departments, which must be done by the current jihadi leadership. From the other side, he provides guidance for the creation of Common Detachments by free will of jihadis throughout the world. Under this guidance is advanced the project of the composition of a similar detachment.

The Common Detachment as thought of by al-Suri may be composed by specialized sub-detachments: the Recruiters Detachment, the Operational Detachment, and the Covert Incitement Detachments. When describing the Covert Incitement Detachments al-Suri mentions that members of this detachment must have “media

experience,” be Internet and electronic communications savvy. The mission of these individuals would be the spread of the Call to resistance and to spread its content through traditional means, but especially through the Internet al.-Suri also recommends that the media campaign should be careful on forwarding communications and “rely on the situation of every place and country.” Al-Suri has written also a separate chapter entitled “The theory of media and incitement,” which is supposed to provide guidance to Covert Incitement Detachments, but that chapter is not made public to the date. Al-Suri calls for a separation of operation-focused detachments and recruiting and inciting focused detachments, since any relationship between these two types of detachments may result in the disruption of those by security forces. From the other side, recruiters and inciters, as al-Suri portrays them, should be individuals highly skilled in related affairs. Also a recruiter “must be able to affect a wide circle of people.”

Another supporter of the leaderless jihad and an advocate of the Internet jihad is also Anwar al-Awlaki.<sup>5</sup> In his “44 Ways To Support Jihad,” he asserts that the most can be realized through the use of Internet tools. One of the ways that the American jihadi suggests to the eventual supporters of jihad is explicitly the “www jihad” and his recommendation is directed to what he calls the “Internet mujahedeen” brothers and sisters, who should support jihad by promoting and extending the jihad propaganda through the Web. Al-Awlaki’s “44 Ways To Support Jihad” calls for the spread of jihadi-related information among the wider public by establishing Internet media outlets, but he does not provide any detailed strategy on how to do that, as al-Suri does.

Rogan (2007) analyzes the perspectives on the importance of the media campaign of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, Abu Ubaid al-Qurashi, Abu Bakr Naji, Sayf al-Adl, Abu Hudhaifa, and Ibn Ahmad al-Salim. The last is the author of a document that appeared on the Web in 2003, entitled “39 Ways To Serve and Participate in Jihad.” Al-Salim, as Rogan reports, advances a way of operation for promoting jihad, which consists of the engagement of cells of two individuals, the first

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<sup>5</sup> Born as Anwar bin Nasser bin Abdulla al-Aulaqi, in New Mexico, U.S.A., and killed by a U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle in Yemen in 2011.



uploading content on the Web and the second commenting and stimulating the participation of the public (p. 34).

The recommendations put forward by jihadi prominent ideologues are quite similar in terms of defining goals and means, but a well-defined strategy is missing. That leaves ample space for self-initiative in dealing with the spread of the call to jihad, by other jihadis and sympathizers. The evolution of the Internet has also contributed to the diversification of the strategies which are used by the latter to promote jihadism on the Web.

#### **F. WEB-BASED JIHADISM IN THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11: PROBLEMS FROM OUTSIDE**

Beside the structural problems related to the Internet's exploitation within the jihadi movement, the jihadi-Internet relationship is affected by problems that are related to operational security. Heghammer (2013) identifies three types of problems within the jihadis use of the Internet: security of communications, the increasing lack of trust, and the saturation of the Web, which makes impossible the spread of the right information. In regard to the first problem, jihadis have to make a silent compromise: if they want their information campaign to survive on the Internet they have to keep a low profile and attract a small number of sympathizers. Popular jihadi websites become objects of interest to law enforcement agencies targeting them and sooner or later they are cracked down. As Sageman (2004) maintains, a "too great reliance on the new technology" makes the network more vulnerable to monitoring and disruption (p. 159). But beside the cases of disruption of these websites or the few cases when Internet activists have been arrested, the greatest achievement of law enforcement agencies is the installation of fear within jihadi websites. The main reason why jihadis moved to Internet was its secure environment for communication, and the paranoia of losing this fundamental factor decreases their abilities to interconnect. Arquilla and Rondfeldt (2009) maintain, "If our enemies came to see cyberspace as insecure, they would probably flee the virtual domain" (p.63). Hegghammer also has conducted research on this issue, and he has noticed the rising lack of trust within jihadi forums (2013). The issue of saturation with

jihadi content materials is also a problem created by the lack of a centralized control on the jihadi information flow on the Internet.

Sageman (2004) brings up some other limitations to the success of jihad through the Internet: first, the accessibility, then the reliability, and finally, the lack of a common language between jihadis (p. 162). Most of the previously mentioned problems that jihadis faced in the first phase of the Internet evolution were inherited in the second phase of the Internet's evolution, when the social networking sites started to appear.

#### **G. JIHADISM IN THE TWO EVOLUTIONARY PHASES OF THE INTERNET**

In the traditional Internet phase, the jihadist propaganda was mainly conducted through simple Web pages (forums or Web logs), and communications were mostly conducted through mailing lists. The jihadist narrative was preserved and controlled through centralized virtual infrastructures. Despite the unlimited spread of these websites, due to the nondiscriminatory nature of the Internet, conducting an effective propaganda campaign represented several difficulties. First, websites needed publicity to attract more potential sympathizers, and when achieving a high visibility they incurred the risk of being monitored or shut down by security agencies. Second, due to technological requisites, a jihadist Web manager needed funds to keep the website running and advanced technical capabilities to cover his virtual activity. Also the audio-visual quality of the jihadi media was very poor. The situation changed with the technological improvement of the Web infrastructure and the emergence of the social networking sites. The emergence of You Tube, Facebook (Mitra, 2010, p. 101), and other free applications on the Internet enables jihadists to increase the quantity and the quality of their communications with the public. Winn and Zakem (2009) report that some of the technological developments that have given rise to Web 2.0 applications include: increased bandwidth, improved tools for posting content, digitalization of technology, the Internet penetration, advances in social networking, and capitalization of the Internet" (p. 29). Weimann (2009) monitored the jihadi presence on the Internet in those years, and as he reports, the websites serving terrorists' purposes did increase exponentially: in the late

1990s there were a dozen, by 2000 all terrorist groups had websites, by 2003 there were 2600, and by 2007 there were over 5800 websites.

The technological potential of the new Internet environment was the leading reason of the “revival” of the jihadi movement on the Internet. After those developments the Internet users could create their own brand of Internet content and make that available to the whole network within seconds. YouTube, as a platform for user-generated content, became the most successful platform for communicating by text and picture aspects of terrorism, which had been never available before, in such short time. The awareness building campaign and the recruitment initiatives were made easier through the use of powerful audio-visual messages. The possibility of supporting the call to jihad with videos, audio messages, and pictures from the battlefield gave a new impetus to the Internet jihad. The influence of the public reached by the jihadi propaganda is supposed to have been easier. Forest and Honkus (2009) observe the influence of communication, noting, “An ideology does not have to be based on fact to be believed; it merely needs to be communicated effectively and persuasively within a favorable cultural, socioeconomic, and political environment which can enable ideological resonance” (p. 5). By contrast, the nature of the new Internet environment made networking easier. Winn and Zakem (2009) maintain that the current environment makes it particularly easy “to create extremist communities within an existing network because of the nature of these sites is highly decentralized and the massive membership makes surveillance nearly impossible” (p. 35). As a result the Web 2.0 applications became used widely by terrorist groups, or their sympathizers, everywhere. Nevertheless social networking sites did not replace traditional sites such as forums and blogs, but as posited by Winn and Zakem (2009), they added “a more amorphous dimension to these movements’ anatomy” (p. 37). But, the question that arises is how did these changes affect the traditional problems that jihadis faced on the Internet in the previous phase?

With regard to the structural management of the jihadi propaganda, the emergence of the Web 2.0 significantly changed the way in which jihadis dealt with their management problem. Conway (2012) recalling the Al Qaeda case gives two reasons for the change. The first was the impossibility of Al Qaeda’s centralized structures to

exercise control over the jihadist narrative. An important event illustrating this problem was the appearance of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi on the Web with his famous videos, one of which showed him decapitating the American Nicholas Berg (p.13). Winn and Zakem (2009) maintain that Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's decision to expose the horrors of combat to the wider public was a strategy of his own, rather than just a display of his will to decapitate enemies (p. 32). Unfortunately Al-Zarqawi's actions did not contribute to the jihadi narrative, and his actions were criticized openly also by other jihadis.

The second reason lies in the technological development and the emergence of new social networking platforms in the Internet landscape, such as Facebook and YouTube, which diversified the ways of transmission and representation of the information (p. 14). Still, the jihadi information operations on the Web remained primarily leaderless, with al-Zarqawi being the most independent jihadi overall, but there was an attempt to reduce the confusion in the spread of jihadi materials. Since, the Al Qaeda leadership could not centralize the spread of the jihadi ideology on the Web, it tried to brand the media it divulgated on the Internet. Several jihadi media companies populated the Web with branded materials. Often these materials were jihadi videos containing a logo or different script containing various signatures. In fact, Lia (2007) maintains that the rise of Web media companies should be seen as a response to the need for branding, to facilitate the easy identification of authentic jihadi media products (p. 6). Lia recognizes significant improvements brought by these companies in the online jihad. From his research on jihadi Web media production companies he notes that those companies: produced more material, and of a better audiovisual quality, than the past companies; they are subordinated to a less hierarchical command structure; as a result of the second characteristic they speak with a more autonomous voice than the earlier; and they tend to network and separate the labor within themselves. The rise of the jihadi Web media production companies (such as the Islamic Media Center, Al-Sahab, Global Islamic Media Front, Al-Fajr, Labayka, al-Furqan, etc.) is also linked with the violent crackdown on the most popular extremist websites, which has made jihadists restructure their Web activities (p. 2).

Over the past ten years, Jihadism Online has expanded quickly, in terms of both quality and quantity. It is also evolving rapidly. It appears to have become more resilient and capable of expanding its presence despite countermeasures. We should expect it to become more interactive, as well as sleeker in layout and design. There will be a greater variety of formats and improved access from a larger variety of portable electronic devices. Violent Islamist websites will also become increasingly multi-lingual (p. 3).

Also Hegghammer (2010) mentions a few developments in the online exposure of the jihad in the recent years: the first, the growth of high-quality audiovisuals propaganda; second, the spread of jihadi propaganda in languages other than Arabic; third, an increasing presence of jihadi propaganda on mainstream media platforms, especially on YouTube. Hegghammer puts an emphasis on the third development since it enables jihadists to exploit more effectively the Internet opportunities, such as its interconnectivity, to the benefit of their cause.

Despite the innovation introduced by these media companies they faced all the problems connected with centralized structures. They were exposed and faced the repression of law enforcement agencies. The al-Sahab media production company, a direct subordinate to Al Qaeda, operated under the direction of the son-in-law of al Zawahiri, Abdul Rehman al-Maghrebi, and after his supposed death by an air attack in 2007, the al-Sahab decreased its Web imprint exponentially. The same happened to the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), a European enterprise of Internet jihadis. Its activity online was disrupted as the German police arrested the members of the initiative in the period 2008–2010. Beside the crackdown on the leaders of these organizations, these companies have left a significant number of jihadi content spread about on the Web. Also, the techniques adopted by these companies were appropriated by independent jihadis that still upload “branded” materials on the Web. One of the surviving enterprises is the Ansar Al-Mujahideen Forum, which offers jihadi materials in several languages and of an excellent audio-visual quality.

Keeping in mind the current technological improvements and the increased quantity of jihadi ideological materials on the Web, the question that is posed is, will the jihadis succeed in increasing recruitment and raise the awareness on their struggle?

Given the current trends this seems quite impossible. Almost a decade after the emergence of the social networking sites and the increase of the world population's access to the Internet, there has been no significant achievement of the jihad, as it was evoked by Osama bin Laden and his followers in the late 1990s. This does not mean that jihadi information operations have failed, or the overall success of the jihad is determined solely by the success or failure of jihadist propaganda on the Web. Sageman (2004) maintains, "For the type of allegiance that the jihad demands, there is no evidence that the Internet is persuasive enough by itself" (p. 127). He recalls previous research conducted by Lofland and Stark, in relation to the process of conversion of individuals to jihadis. The process of conversion (of an individual), as Lofland and Stark determine it (in Sageman, 2004, pp. 126–127), follows seven steps, in which three elements are general background factors, consisting of: (1) the experience in enduring, acutely felt tensions, (2) within a religious problem-solving perspective, (3) which leads him to define himself as religious seeker; and the following four, that Sageman determines as situational factors dependent on timing: (4) encountering the Divine Principle at a turning point at his life, (5) wherein an effective bond is formed with one or more converts, (6) where extra-cult attachments are absent or neutralized, and, (7) where, if he is to become a deployable agent, he is exposed to intensive interaction (p. 126). The processes that are described previously are difficult to be evoked simply by contact with the Internet, despite its role in helping the radicalization of certain parts within the public. Sageman (2004) maintains that joining the jihad is actually a process and not a single decision (p. 91). Moreover, Sageman, adds that "the notion of recruitment implies an active process through which an organizational insider gets a new person to work for the organization (p. 121). These types of interactions are more difficult to be verified given the high levels of the lack of trust within the Internet communicative platforms.

The Internet jihad may seem to be in its glory days, if evaluated from the quantity of the jihadi outlets of materials, or their respective quality, but the real struggle on the ground is facing huge problems. Most of the leaders of Al Qaeda have been eliminated and the remaining ones are on the run, which has made it difficult to conduct the information-jihad in an organized manner. Beside Al Suri's recommendations for an

effective leaderless jihad, there is still much confusion on the Internet and on the ground. Sageman (2004) writes on the limitations of the leaderless social movements:

To survive, it requires a constant stream of new violent actions to hold the interest of potential newcomers to the movement, create the impression of visible progress toward a goal, and give potential recruits a vicarious experience before they take the initiative to engage in their own terrorist activities. (p. 145)

Further on, Sageman recognizes another limitation to the leaderless jihad, the impossibility to impose discipline, which is fundamental in the survival of such a movement.

Other important factors that affect the jihadi use of the new Internet applications, known as social networking sites, are related to the flow of the audience in those sites and the use of these sites for networking among jihadis. As the first factor suggests jihadis tend to use social networking sites because of the quantity of users of those applications. YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are ranked in the top 15 most visited websites in the world (Alexa, 2013). Facebook is ranked second and its penetration, even in areas of the world with low Internet penetration rates, is very high. In contrast, YouTube provides an excellent tool for the spread of high quality audio-visual content and allows users to receive feedback and also share materials. The use of social networking websites by jihadis is emphasized in the related literature. Sageman (2008), in describing the historical development of interactions within terrorist networks identifies two stages: the first one, taking place until 2004, presupposes the building of terrorist networks as a consequence of face-to-face meetings; the second, from 2004 onward, presupposes the creation of networks and the build-up of inspirations toward terrorism through Internet interactions (p. 109). Everton (2012) recognizes the emergent importance of social media and the potential of a proper study of them (p. 70) while assessing that the techniques of collection and processing of data are in their infancy (p. 71).

In fact, the tools available for the study of social networking sites consist of computer programs able to track, collect, and process the data gathered through social networking sites or through the Web. In fact, social networking sites do not help jihadis more than traditional websites do. Issues related to the lack of trust persist also in social

networking sites and the overall operational security in social networking sites is lower than in traditional websites. The first factor that contributes to the diminishing of the operational security is the higher chance of disruption of the networks by security forces. By subscribing to social networking sites, jihadis and their sympathizers enter in a defined and monitored database. In the case of Facebook, every member of the network appears with his chosen name by a simple search, and even if this user wants to keep a low profile and unsubscribe from the option to show his profile in search engines, it is quite easy for the database managers to monitor his or his group's activities within the network. Another factor that diminishes the operational security level of social networking site users is exactly the networking. In traditional websites the network is centered on the website. Each of the users is connected with other users; let them be also agent provocateurs; through the website, the forum, Web log, or anything similar. In case of the disruption of the network it is harder to identify all the endpoints. But, in the case of social networking sites the users interconnect with each other individually and they form a social network with a high number of nodes. The nodes can be identified easily in case of suspicious activities by one member of the network and the following discovery of it.

So, what makes jihadis use social networking sites? The answer relies on the massive presence of Internet users in the networking sites, with Facebook and YouTube leading the game. Since September 2012, Facebook has more than 1 billion users and is the second most-visited website after Google. It is followed by YouTube with 800 million unique visitors each month, and the third most-visited website globally. Surprisingly, the flow of Internet users to social networking sites worries also prominent jihadis. Bunzel (2013) discusses an essay written by a jihadi ideologue, Abu Sa'd al-'Amili, on the state of online global jihad. Al-'Amili laments the general decline of the participation in jihadi online forums, which he finds as proper centers of jihadi discussion. The jihadi ideologue criticizes former forum users for lack of loyalty toward the jihadi forums. He tries to identify the reasons behind the flagging interest in jihadi forums and numbers several of them, which are: the periodic disruptions by Western law enforcement agencies, the increasing fear of monitoring and tracking by them, the



departure of jihadi members to join the jihad in Syria, the migration of forum users to Facebook and Twitter (he recalls that the usage of Facebook and Twitter was a consequence of the disruption of jihadi forums), a general withdrawal due to the lack of attention on the threads written by forum members. Al-'Amili also identifies a few steps for reinvigorating the forums, one of which is to abandon the social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, because they being run by enemies. While Al-'Amili criticizes the abandonment of jihadi forums in favor of social networking sites, he himself resorted to having a Twitter account according to Bunzel. Beside the observations of Al-'Amili, social networking sites represent an efficient way of exploiting the evolution of the Internet to the benefit of social movements. The social networking sites have been used extensively in the Arab Spring events (Petit, 2012). Hezbollah and al-Shabab have official Twitter accounts through which they communicate their declarations to their affiliates and the general public.

Of particular interest in matters of the evolution of networking technologies usage by terrorists is a RAND report from 2007, which was developed under the auspices of the Department of Homeland Security. It conducted research on the potential application of information and communication technologies that may be used across the full range of activities that make up terrorist operations and whether these applications can lead to new and different approaches to terrorist operations (in Don, 2007, p. xiii). The RAND analysts came up with three hypothetical strategies that would be adopted by terrorists in matters of obtaining and using network technologies: the first, terrorists would obtain and use network technologies by investing in them, in pursuit of a significant effect on attack outcomes or perhaps operational efficiency; second, terrorists would rely on versatile technologies or pursue a wide variety of individual technologies, with moderate expectations on this approach to network technologies; and third, terrorists would use technology opportunistically, with the expectation that technology will only contribute to attack outcomes and operational efficiency in minor ways.

The assessment of these expectations of terrorists, as RAND's analysts suggest, will be made by terrorists based on the benefits these choices might confer, such as the

increase of the organization's ability to carry out strategic activities such as recruiting and training, or improvement of the outcome of terrorist attacks (p. xv).

The conclusions of the RAND study were as follows:

- Future network technologies are most likely to result in real but modest improvement in overall terrorist group efficiency but not dramatic improvements in their operational outcomes.
- Terrorists will most likely acquire network technologies for the versatility and variety that they offer and will use them to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of their supporting activities.
- Attempting to preclude terrorists from getting the types of technology they want will not be practical, and developing direct counters to them will unlikely yield a high payoff.
- Exploitation seems the more promising option for governments.
- Even though there do not appear to be any network technologies that offer revolutionary capabilities in the immediate future, security services need to monitor the development of technologies in the event that such a capability emerges. (pp. xvi-xvii)

Based on the RAND report conclusions on the use of social networking technologies, we can drive our own conclusions on how security forces may deal with the terrorist use of the new Internet environment in the future.

The current trends show an increasing rate of Internet penetration in all areas of the world, which will provide to terrorists new spaces to conduct their information operations through the use of the Internet. The governments should exploit all the possible areas where terrorists fail to achieve perfection. The government's action should focus on the periodic monitoring of and crackdown on jihadi Web spaces, but also conduct Web-based information operations in order to counter the jihadi radicalization strategies, and also undermine jihadi sympathizers' trust when participating in radical forums.

The objective of governmental agencies should be not to eradicate the jihadi websites of forums, but rather to monitor them and deter potential users from using them. As Gray (2003, p. 461) states, terrorism falls when it runs out of psychological, social, and political steam.

### **III. OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND LIMITS OF THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY IN COUNTERING TERRORISM ON THE INTERNET**

#### **A. POSSIBLE SCENARIOS OF INTERNET CONTROL**

The Internet is an important source of information that serves Intelligence Community (IC) purposes and needs. The object of information collection by intelligence agencies may be different as well, ranging from the non-secretive collection of open data to the collection of data protected by property and privacy rights, or even data protected by government secrecy laws, as in the case of exploitation of cyber-attacks to obtain information from foreign government bodies. One can list as many reasons as possible, but we will focus on the collection and use of data sourcing from the Internet that may serve the IC in countering terrorism. Here let us distinguish two main purposes connected with IC actions toward combating terrorism, the first dealing with prevention, and the second dealing with the suppression and targeting of terrorist activities and terrorists. Further on, we analyze three possible and available scenarios in which the IC operates in attempting to exploit the Internet in countering terrorism: let the first scenario be characterized by an absolute dominance of the Internet “terrain” by intelligence bodies; let the second scenario be characterized by a contained dominance of the Internet by intelligence bodies; and let the third scenario be characterized by a strictly limited, minimal or absent control of the information flow on the Internet by intelligence bodies. The question that arises and which we attempt to answer is: what are the opportunities, challenges, and limits of the collection and analysis of information by intelligence operators in countering terrorism in each of the scenarios described earlier?

#### **B. THE “NO” CONTROL SCENARIO**

As a starting point we begin with the scenario in which there is limited, minimal, or no control of the information flow on the Internet by the IC. This situation may also be a result of the lack of Internet penetration in the society, but also a result of the incapacity of governmental or non-governmental agencies to exploit the Internet for the benefit of counterterrorist efforts. Usually these conditions are met and coexist together. Using

statistics from the Internet World Stats (2013), in which both Asia and Africa rank below the world average in Internet penetration, the 2012 data results show 34.3%, or simply one out of three individuals, is connected to the Internet. The Internet penetration into society is a very important factor in determining the approach of local intelligence communities to this field. Of course, if no one is connected to the Internet there would be no data to collect and exploit. But, this assertion is becoming less and less feasible, since Internet usage and penetration is growing very quickly all over the world. Anyway, the penetration of Internet services or connection to a population is not the only determinant factor in making the Internet a domain of terrorists. The security set up of the country, or region, and also the law enforcement levels and legislation are very important factors of “how much and what” can be found out there. At this point let us return to the purposes of the IC. The prevention of terrorism, as it is referred to here, consists of depriving the terrorists of publicity, public and political reach, and also mass communication. The actions here may include information operations, deception strategies, disruption of information channels etc., on the Internet.

Now let us project these strategies to our scenario and evaluate the opportunities offered by the Internet. Since it serves primarily as a mass communication tool, a low penetration rate reduces the success of communication campaigns, measured in the number of reached users. The same may be said for the effectiveness, measured in reached and radicalized users. In contrast, the same cannot be said for the breadth of communication and sophistication used. Independent of Internet penetration on a certain population, if terrorists operate in that area they may use the same applications on the Internet that are found anywhere else. There are no limitations on this perspective, and the terrorists may exploit using the most sophisticated techniques in forwarding their political messages. Still, it may turn out to be a waste of resources for them, since the objective is to radicalize more people and in this scenario only a limited number of people has Internet connectivity.

From the perspective of the IC operating in this scenario, and the assumption that its capabilities to counter this dimension of terrorist operations are limited, it does not mean that the contest is lost. Reasonably, the terrorist ideology spreading on the Internet

is proportional to the extension of the Internet itself, but the situation differs with the depth of terrorist engagement. Terrorists may engage in extensive and sophisticated communication campaigns, and perhaps achieve some success. From the IC perspective, there are plenty of ways to obtain information and conduct counter-operations, given the limitations set by Internet penetration on the population. Its effects may be noticed early by “traditional” methods or by monitoring the physical dimension of potentially radicalizing centers. The simple monitoring of radicalizing materials on the Internet can also be made without sophisticated technologies or software, which by our assumption, the IC in that region lacks. Since the goal of the IC community is the prevention of the “publicity” spread by the terrorists, the issue needs definition. There is a wide consensus among scholars about the necessity of publicity from the terrorists’ side, which helps them in recruiting more individuals to the cause, strengthens their political stance, and attracts sponsors.

All this, of course, cannot be achieved effectively through secret chat rooms, encrypted Web pages, or other Internet tools. Terrorists and affiliates looking for publicity for the cause have to trade their “Internet operational security” in order to spread messages. This “operational security” in our case does not necessarily guarantee information about the messenger but certainly provides all the information necessary about the message itself. To make it clearer, let us consider the example of a You Tube user, who may be affiliated with an Islamic radical organization. He may make use of You Tube options by opening an account by a different name and disclose no real information at all, and after doing that he may post or share videos or other Internet content that promote terrorism with the wider community of the Internet. A non-sophisticated IC, as in our case, may not obtain any information at all about the identity of the user, but all the videos or other posts of him are easily accessible, and along with that also plenty of information about the reached community. You Tube provides data about the number of views of a video, number of likes and dislikes, a temporal graph showing the performance of the public reach of the video, comments left by other users, etc. Apart from the information provided for free from You Tube, other contextual, linguistic, and relational analysis is available. The IC can obtain data about the message

that the organization wants to forward to the public and act toward countering the organization's activity by exploiting the data obtained by analyzing its messages. YouTube was used as an example not only because it is a preferred tool for terrorist organizations and their affiliates to spread messages both with voice and images, but also as an Internet application, which is a powerful representative of the new environment on the Internet, characterized by the emergence of social networking sites, such as YouTube itself, Facebook, My Space, Twitter, etc.

The powerful graphics, excellent outreach, and high adaptability make the social networking sites a preferred channel for terrorists to communicate with the public. Beside the benefits, these Internet applications also reduce the possibility of terrorist organizations and their affiliates keeping a low public profile. Still, the terrorists sacrifice their operational security in matters of information campaigns for public exposure, primarily because they need the public, and consequently they choose social media because that is where everybody can be found more than anywhere else on the Internet. In the world ranking of websites provided by Alexa, Facebook and YouTube rank respectively in first and third place, while Twitter, Windows Live, and Blogspot, stay within the top 15 Internet sites most visited in the world. The power of social media to attract both the general public, and possible recruits or sympathizers of terrorism, is recognized also by the radical and terrorist preachers on the Internet. In an Internet posting written by a jihadi ideologue named Abu Sa'd al-'Amili, the state of the online global jihad is described (Bunzel, 2013). The ideologue laments the general decline of the participation in jihadi online forums, which are thought to be more exclusive, and consequently more efficient in his opinion. In identifying the reasons behind the flagging interest in jihadi forums he mentions the migration of the forum's users to Facebook and Twitter.

From this point let us pass on the other purposes of the IC, which are the suppression and the targeting of terrorists by exploiting Internet data. In the focused scenario, where the IC has very limited capabilities to monitor and control the flow of data on the Internet, the terrorists may have an advantage especially in regard to operational security and communication. The capability of contrasting electronic

communications and especially Internet communications requires highly capable intelligence operators and costly devices and software, the cost of which cannot be sustained by most of the countries or ICs of the world. Intelligence sharing and cooperation may be a solution but still, given these types of resources and technologies, countries and agencies who own them are reluctant to provide unlimited support and access to countries and agencies who do not. Nevertheless, in the current scenario, the action against terrorism does not depend only on the technologies which make possible advanced tracking of Internet communications and data, or break passwords of closed forums, emails and accounts of suspicious Internet users. The IC community in this scenario may also make assessments and analyze open data, as described in the previous step, which could determine the steps to take in shaping an effective counterterrorist strategy. In contrast, the inability to read terrorists' messages does not necessarily mean an intelligence failure, and not even a terrorist success over the security establishment. To advance in their struggle terrorists need to act, and act in a way that influences most of the entire community and its government; otherwise, they fail. The "hard talk" needs resources and people, which in the given scenario cannot be procured simply by writing an email or debating in a forum.

Beside the chances of being monitored by the IC, and subsequently tracked and eliminated, terrorists face other problems in using the Internet for their purposes. First, as Sageman mentions (2008, p. 110) the terrorists have become familiar with the Internet and continue to use it because of pressure from the governmental forces in the real world. This relationship is a forced consequence, not a choice or preference. Second, independent of the level of sophistication of the security forces, terrorists do not have an easy path in using the Internet. Problems related to the lack of trust and operational management on the Internet negatively affect the terrorists' efforts to advance their cause (See Heghammer, 2013; Sageman, 2004, p. 159; Arquilla and Rondfeldt, 2009, p. 63).

### **C. THE "FAIR" CONTROL SCENARIO**

The next scenarios share most of the characteristics analyzed in the first one. This is because the root problems remain the same and also because the second scenario

consequently follows the first scenario. In the case when the IC has a contained control over the Internet, in terms of technical capabilities, it is necessary to mention some distinguishing features in comparison with the first scenario. In this scenario it is assumed that Internet penetration and usage are at satisfactory levels from the side of the population, and from the side of the IC (and security forces), there is a developed capacity in tracking, monitoring, and targeting terrorists operating on the Internet. This scenario may well reflect the situation in most of the developed world, and especially in the countries of the Western hemisphere. From a terrorist's perspective, the Internet is used for a wide array of purposes: internal communication, publicity, recruiting, fundraising, etc., by actors involved in terrorism: hard core members, supporters, and also sympathizers. In the case of prevention measures, here the situation is more complicated than in the first scenario. The complication derives from the amount of information that already exists and the information that is projected continuously often reproduced and shared widely by the whole array of terrorists and their supporters and sympathizers, throughout the Web. Here it is necessary to distinguish opportunities and difficulties that the IC faces in preventing terrorism, as well as the opportunities and problems that the terrorists and their affiliated individuals face in their efforts to forward their cause through the Internet.

Also, the opportunity of one group is the benefit of the other. Starting with the terrorists, the opportunities that are presented to them relate to the benefits of the Internet as a free mass media, but also to the lack of extensive capabilities of the IC to counter terrorism on the Internet, which will be explained later. The problems relate both to the lack of trust in the online communication, given the effective disruption of terrorist websites and the infiltration of intelligence operators into the Web forums hosting terrorists and their affiliates, and the nature of the current Internet environment. As mentioned before, social networking sites are being extensively used for spreading terrorism-related information and also for communication in a higher audio-visual quality than ever. But the nature of these sites, and also the higher Internet penetration rates and Internet usage guarantees no secrecy at all, which discourages both terrorists and possible recruits from using common Internet outlets. Another problem is the publicity that is



attired by the open-Web networks as they become more numerous, in terms of followers and diversification in terms of content. Once the network of sympathizers increases, the risk of ending up targeted by the IC becomes imminent. In this case, terrorists not only risk damaging their operational security on the Internet but also have to sacrifice the dimension of their outreach if they want their network to be safe enough. Another problem that the terrorists have to worry about is the selectivity of the public. With higher Internet penetration and usage rates the public becomes more selective and reasonable in believing the terrorists' narrative.

Conversely, the opportunities that are presented to the IC relate to the technological advantage that security forces have in comparison to the terrorist organizations. By increasing their data monitoring and processing capabilities the IC has more advantages in countering the information campaigns of the terrorists. Still, these capabilities are far from perfect. Here start the problems. First, despite the sophisticated technologies and methods in use nowadays, the IC does not have a clear picture of the terrorist efforts. This is not possible since there is still a large percentage of population, including terrorists or affiliates, that do not make use of the Internet at all, and who often do not even make use of traceable technology, such as mobile phones or other devices. From this perspective traditional methods of intelligence gathering drive the efforts. Traditional methods and Internet-based models of intelligence gathering should be understood as being complementary, not exclusive of each other. Second, the technological advantage in processing terrorism-related data is limited to national IC while terrorists often operate especially through the Internet internationally. This problem does not only follow national borders but also "agency" borders. The diversification of the intelligence gathering and processing bodies makes the analysis and interpretation of the data collected more diversified, which may lead to a sort of "Rashomon" effect, but also redundancy. Third, the technological capabilities of the IC in this scenario do not enable definitive collection and analysis of the Internet-sourced data.

The collection of data through the Internet is made either manually, or by software that searches and collects by the use of keywords. The manual collection leaves room for a lot of subjectivity, but the same might be said of the automatized methods.

Keyword searches have limitations, since linguistic diversities may affect the collection and further on also the analysis of the data. The processes of manipulation and interpretation of the data may result in difficulties as well. The problem in dealing with the data collected through these techniques is connected also with the difficulty in recognizing and separating the important from the unimportant information. The lack of a model or a defined characteristic of the information to be retrieved costs the IC a lot of time and resources.

The same problems are reflected in the efforts for the suppression and targeting of terrorists by using their imprints retrieved from the information on the Internet. Given the assumed characteristics of the scenario, the IC has an advantage when it succeeds in identifying its target traces on the Internet. By tracking identified terrorists' steps on the Internet or the virtual world, the physical location and targeting of the individual is an easier process than in the first scenario. Still, this is a final step. The problem consists not only of identifying the "important" traces, but also the important "players." Since there is a wider public connected to the Internet, it becomes harder to distinguish the sympathizer who keeps posting and sharing Al Qaeda's videos on You Tube, from the recruiter, or the operative who will blow up a city bus the next day. Other limits derive from a legislative point of view. Human rights, freedom of expression, and other civil rights make it harder for the security forces to suppress every single radical viewpoint that exists on the Internet.

#### **D. THE "TOTAL" CONTROL SCENARIO**

The next scenario is a very futuristic one, but it shall not be excluded from this kind of analysis. In the case where the IC has an absolute dominance over Internet information flow, the only limit that the IC might have would be the limits that it would put on itself. An establishment of this kind is a problem itself. Nonetheless, the IC may achieve full benefits from this dominance only if there is total Internet penetration and usage by the population. This means that everybody would be connected to the Internet and everybody would make use of it for every single purpose, terrorist purposes included. This looks quite unrealistic, since the moment that the terrorists know that they are being

tracked they would cease to conduct their business through that tool. Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2009) maintain the same, “If our enemies came to see cyberspace as insecure, they would probably flee the virtual domain” (p. 63). In this case, there is no distinction between prevention and targeting of terrorism. Even rejecting the Internet would not be a solution for terrorists since that may also be interpreted as a suspicious act. The problem does not lie only on what is already inside the Internet, but also what is not, as Troianovski and Siobhan (2013) report. The issue as reported here is related more to force and operations-related information protection, rather than an issue of reactive and proactive behavior toward counter-government forces. As said before, this situation is more imaginary rather than realistic, even if possible in the near future.

## **E. CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, countering terrorism on the Internet presents both opportunities and difficulties for the IC. The subjective, manual, and case-by-case evaluation approach in analyzing terrorism-related information deriving from the Internet, and the objective, automatically retrieved and processed data approach may be useful if used separately, but a comprehensive approach may be more effective, especially in a scenario when the IC has a contained control over the Internet information flow. An important fact to think about is that terrorists make use of the Internet as a consequence of their suppression in the real world, and the IC may make it possible to keep the Internet as the terrorists’ last stronghold, rather than as their second choice.

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## **IV. THE NATURE OF THE JIHADI ENTERPRISE IN THE BALKANS: THE ALBANIAN CASE**

### **A. A SHORT BACKGROUND**

The sudden fall of communism and the events that shaped the transition of Balkan states from autocratic regimes to more liberal ones allowed several Islamic factions engaged in terrorism to conduct their “business” in those countries, especially the ones that had a strong presence of Muslim communities. The case of Albania and the surrounding countries makes a perfect example to show how terrorist entities approached the Balkans and what counterterrorism measures were taken by the governments. This chapter assesses the terrorist “enterprise” in Albania and in the neighboring countries where people of Albanian nationality live. Basically, it answers the following questions: Why and how did foreign terrorists enter Albania, and in the Balkans in general? What was their activity in the country and in the region? How were those foreign terrorist groups disrupted? Finally, what did they leave behind that may be of concern to security forces of the Balkan countries?

Before explaining how foreign Islamic terrorists reached the Balkans, it is important to mention that a substantial part of the Balkans population is Muslim, and that they practice a very liberal form of Islam, which is very different from how Islam is practiced in the countries from which the foreign terrorists came. The liberal form of Islam practiced in the Balkans is due to the reasons connected with the introduction of Islam to the Balkans (by the Ottoman invasion), the development of it under the *Hanafi* school of thought, and the presence of various Sufi sects, among others the *Bektasi* sect, which is more widespread in Albania. (See Appendix A for statistical data about religions in the Balkans.) The political stance that the regimes of the Balkan states took toward religion, mostly by marginalizing it, also had an important effect on the way religion is practiced in the Balkan countries.

In the case of Albania, religious activities and manifestations have been banned since 1967 during the communist regime, after being considered incompatible with the atheist character of the country's political ideology. After the fall of communism in Albania, the law that banned religions was abolished, and that led to the creation of respective religious communities, such as the Albanian Muslim Community (AMC), led by former (before the abolishment) clerics.

## **B. THE EMERGENCE OF FOREIGN RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE**

Along with the religious “revival” managed by national institutions, many foreign religious organizations rushed to play a role on their own. In regard to the Islamic engagement, several Islamic organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and charities, started to establish their presence in the country. The main reason for the sudden attention of these Islamic organizations toward Albania was the Muslim heritage of the country. At the time there were only a few statistical data on the religion of Albanians within the Albanian state. According to a 1930 census, within the population of 1,003,124 souls, 69% were declared Muslims, 21% were declared Christian Orthodox, and 10% were declared Roman Catholic, while only 347 citizens did not declare their religion (Epstein, 1938, pp. 685–690). The 1930 census remained the only statistical source on religion in Albania for many years, and probably these percentages inspired the Arab donors to begin sending funds to Albania in the early 1990s. In 2011 the Albanian government conducted the first census on the religious identity of Albanian citizens since 1930. (The inclusion of questions about religion was denounced publicly by several political and public society organizations, considering the attempt as outrage violation of human rights, followed by an invitation to the citizens to reject answering the related questions.)

As those organizations emerged in the country, they noticed the lack of qualified religious leaders to drive the revival of Islam, and their immediate solution was to take an active role to address this issue. The lack of properly qualified religious leaders was recognized as a problem in regard to the relative expansion of foreign influence in matters of religion, both in Albania and in Kosovo (ICG, 2001, p. 2; ICG, 2001a, p. 3).

This lack was exploited most recently by offering scholarships in Islamic studies to Albanian youth, while encouraging freelancers sympathetic to radical Islamic sects in offering religious services to the public, and by disseminating religious texts for free. A similar approach was verified in all Balkan countries, not only in Albania.

Another factor that enabled terrorist entities to reach Albania was the permissive role of the authorities. The role of the governing authorities in this outbreak of Islamic entities in Albania was fundamental. The inability to attract Western aid and financing to the levels required for a normal transition made the Albanian authorities permissive and more receptive to the Islamic activities in Albania, despite the disagreements over these issues in the Parliament or in the public opinion (Deliso, 2007, p. 30). The pro-Islamic-inflow nature of the government of Albania in the early 1990s is well known. Besides granting Albanian citizenship to a great number of foreign “investors” from Arab countries without any particular identity verification, during the years from 1992 to 1994, the story of the former intelligence services director, Bashkim Gazidede, gives further insights on the level of permissive conduct of the Albanian authorities in relation to Islamic enterprises wanting to establish a presence in Albania. Gazidede was appointed as a director of the National Information Service (NIS), the only intelligence agency in the country, immediately after the newly elected Democratic Party (DP) administration took office in 1992.

Beside his official occupation, the head of the NIS, had strong personal relationships with most of the directors of the Islamic organizations operating in Albania and he was also appointed to the role of President of a newly-formed Albanian Islamic organization, the Islamic Intellectuals Association of Albania, funded by foreign Islamic charities. This welcoming environment was mainly due to the expectation of funding arriving from Islamic sources, and was characteristic of all Balkan countries. Given the permissive environment and a weak rule of law in those countries, most of the Islamic organizations entering the Balkans became a safe haven for individuals engaged in terrorism activities. Kittner (2007) defines terrorist safe havens as “geographical spaces where Islamist terrorists are able to successfully establish an organizational and operational base that may include, one, all or some of these activities: fundraising

(including money laundering, charities, criminal activities, drug trafficking, taxes on the population, etc.), communications network (for efficient command and control and intelligence gathering), operational space for training (and access to weapons and ammunitions), logistic network (to enable travel, the movement of money, the access to fraudulent document, etc.) (p. 308). Terrorist safe havens may emerge and develop under certain conditions. Kittner identifies several factors, including geographical features of a territory, weak governance, and spread of corruption, a violent past, and wealth conditions (p. 313). The eruption of internal conflicts, first in Bosnia (1992–1995), then in Albania (1997), Kosovo (1998–1999), and Macedonia (2001) and the spread of weapons and ammunitions made those countries more preferred for jihadi-type engagements. Kittner also maintains that “a state’s inability to adequately govern its citizens and administer its institutions reveals to Islamist terrorists uncontrollable territories that they can exploit” (p. 310).

The most flagrant case of exploitation of internal problems to shelter terrorist groups was verified after the eruption of the Bosnian civil war in 1992, when up to 3000 (some sources suggest a larger number, up to 6000) foreign fighters, declared as mujahedeen, fled to the country and formed military units and joined the Bosnian Army, in its fight against Serbian and Croatian paramilitary forces. When the war was over the Bosnian government faced huge problems in dealing with those individuals dispersed all over the country and conducting indiscriminate attacks. Nevertheless, the invitation was surprisingly official, coming from the Bosnian head of the state, President Alija Izetbegovic (ICG, 2001, p. 11), who was appointed as the honorary commander of the “El Majaheed” unit, a military force made up entirely of foreign Muslim fighters who were officially part of the Seventh Muslim Brigade of the Third Corps of the Bosnian Army. The generosity of Izetbegovic went further in 1993, when he decided to provide all these individuals with the right of Bosnian citizenship. Given the tumultuous situation in Bosnia, there is little evidence of the process of distribution of passports to and documentation of these individuals. The Bosnian case differs from the Albanian case because of the open invitation to mujahedeen fighters by the Bosnian President, while in the case of Albania; the foreign terrorists infiltrated the Islamic organizations in the



country semi-covertly. Besides that, the personal relationships between political leaders and prominent foreign Islamic figures, the provision of official documentation and shelter, and also the way they practically reached the countries and got to get along are similar. The most active entities engaged in the “circulation” of foreign terrorists and extremists, and related funding in the Balkans were the Islamic NGOs. The funding of foreign charities operating in the Balkans came from wealthy Arabic countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait etc.. Both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had governmental organizations, such as the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs, for example (Johnson, 2007, p. 101), that were engaged in collecting and distributing the funds, but they were exercising less control on how the funds were used by NGOs operating outside their countries, especially in the pre-9/11 period.

### **C. THE CHARITIES NETWORK**

From research attempting to analyze the spread of Islamic NGOs in the Balkans using data from contained sources,<sup>6</sup> and by using visual analytics software, it is apparent that the Islamic NGOs operating in the Balkans were interconnected with each other. The connections were identified (coded) as the exchange of officials, exchange of funds, funding partnerships, or direction of funds to common terrorist organizations. Appendix B contains a number of data visualizations extracted from link analysis, geo-temporal analysis, and social network analysis (SNA) of the Islamic NGO organizations operating in the Balkans who have been identified as supporters of terrorism. An important detail that emerged from the research was the financial links between those organizations and terrorist organizations. The link between Islamic charities and terrorism activities financing is well known and analyzed in counterterrorism studies. As Lewitt and Jacobson (2008) report, charities engage in various ways in terrorist activities: fundraising, diverting the purpose of funds, creating fertile recruitment grounds, offering cover, and laundering money (p. 10).

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<sup>6</sup> See the List of References.

Similar results were obtained from the social network analysis that was conducted for this thesis; the most interconnected terrorist organization (with Islamic NGOs operating in the early '90s in the Balkans) was al Qaeda. The links between al Qaeda and Islamic NGOs from a general perspective are well-described by Comras (2007):

Al Qaeda established and infiltrated several international Muslim charities, using them to collect and mask their funds. These charities disbursed funds not only to legitimate humanitarian relief but also for Al Qaeda activities, including the establishment and maintenance of new, radical Islamic centers. These centers propagated a virulent theology and strong opposition to Western culture and values, and they provided Al Qaeda and other Salafist groups the means to undertake extensive worldwide indoctrination and recruitment activities. (pp. 115–116)

The most active NGOs and charities operating in the Balkans and supporting terrorism were the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO, aka IGASA), the Al Haramain Foundation (AHF), the Global Relief Fund (GRF), the Taibah International (TI), the Benevolence International Foundation (BIF), the Third World Relief Agency (TWRA), and the Al-Furqan (AF). There is little evidence on the amounts of money they have circulated and provided for terrorist purposes given their dual purpose, but just to give an idea, the whole Bosnian mujahedeen were organized, had their travel paid for and they were maintained in the country for several years through the funds of the branches of these organizations in Bosnia. The cover of humanitarian activities has worked well for NGOs associated with terrorist organizations in the Balkans, since the region has been a hotbed for several conflicts and characterized by a lack of law enforcement, insufficient border security, corruption, and organized crime. Some of them existed only on paper as fictitious humanitarian NGOs in order to allow the flow of money from foreign accounts, but some others did conduct humanitarian activities by distributing goods and services to communities. Their terrorist engagement consisted in providing Islamic terrorists with false documents, easily procured either from the black market or by corrupt state officials, or by facilitating and funding terrorists' travel throughout the region.

#### **D. THE ROLE OF FOREIGN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN SUPPORTING TERRORISM IN ALBANIA**

Returning to the Albanian case, in 1990 the International Humanitarian Islamic Organization (IIRO) was the first Islamic charity to establish a presence in the country, and it engaged in the distribution of medical and relief supplies. Later on the AHF, the GRF, the BIF and the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) established their presence also. Along with religious and humanitarian non-governmental organizations, some financial organizations, like the Islamic Development Bank amongst others, motivated by the proclaimed Islamic heritage of Albanians and the eagerness of the Albanian government to develop relationships with the rich countries of the Arab world. They approached the country promising investments and funding for the reconstruction of its underdeveloped infrastructure. By 1994, there were two other major Islamic financial institutions in Albania, the Arab-Albanian Bank and the Malaysian Bank of Albania, along with several private companies having Arab owners, like the Caravan Construction Company of the Saudi Yasin Al-Qadi, the Saudi Cable Company, the Kuwaiti Mak-Albanian Construction Company.

Kullolli (2009) recalls a U.S. Department of State report on human rights of 1997 where the number of Islamic representatives in Albania amounted to 95. Most of these entities, took a financial approach in attracting Albanians, often donating to families monthly in order to keep them under their influence. Along the financial help, some of the charities provided scholarships for children of poor families, sending the students into the Gulf countries and elsewhere. The charities also funded the construction of new mosques and reconstruction of former ones (pp. 8–9). For some of them, the cover as charities and their social programs were both intended to profess an unknown and radical form of Islam to Albanians, and guarantee transnational jihadis a secure base and employment in order not to raise suspicions, despite the fragile law enforcement agencies of Albania. The most evident example regarding the activity of Islamic NGOs in Albania is brought by Vickers, recalling the case of Bulqiza, a mining town in Eastern Albania. The city's population is extremely poor and the sole employment perspectives are the mining facilities, which run their business in a shadowy manner. This situation was

exploited by Taibah International, which started to pay members of the Bektasi community of the town to convert to Sunni Islam. Scholarships for their children were also offered.

On another occasion, the organization invited and hosted a dozen foreign men, who were referred to by locals as “Taliban” because of their long beards and short trousers (p. 9). Similar cases include those of Prrenjas, Qafe Thanë, and Peshkopi, all tiny towns with high unemployment rates. Yasin Al-Qadi, Saudi, and Abdul Latif Saleh, indicted in the early 2000s for terrorism financing charges, had previously built a mosque in Kukës, another city amongst the country’s poorest, located in the northeast of Albania. Saleh, a Jordanian who obtained an Albanian passport in the early 1990s is accused of leading a terrorist group in Albania, which was funded by the AFH (p. 10). The U.S. Department of Treasury alleged his cooperation with Osama bin Laden over this matter. As it is reported by the ICG (2001) report, there is also a strong belief that Osama bin Laden visited Albania in the period 1992–1996 (p. 5). The beliefs are not proven officially but, despite that, the later arrest of al Qaeda operatives in Albania and the presence of NGOs and charities that were globally known as supporters of terrorism and Al Qaeda only reinforces those beliefs. The dubious relationship between Albanian authorities and Islamic entities present in Albania in the years 1992–1996 allows the rise of suspicions. Saleh the country fled mysteriously following the 9/11 attacks in the United States.

#### **E. THE RELIGIOUS TENSION WITHIN ALBANIA**

The effects of the Islamic “humanitarian operations” at a wider level would be seen in the early 2000s when some declarations within the Albanian Muslim Community (AMC) came to public attention. These declarations denounced the pressure coming from Islamic graduates of foreign Islamic schools, who were trying to replace the old clerics, who professed a traditional form of Islam, which has nothing in common with the more radical and extremist forms of worship propagandized by these graduates. The mysterious killing of a prominent member of the AMC in his office in Tirana in 2003 shocked the Albanian public and made the government put more efforts into guaranteeing security for

the AMC leaders. The Albanian “Salafists,” despite not being identified formally, had also been causing tension among the Bektashi Muslims in Albania. The Bektashi sect is based on the Sufi ideology of Islam, and the Albanian Bektashi are well known for their liberalism in regard to religious norms. As Vickers reports (2008, p. 8) the Bektashi community leaders in Albania have clearly denounced the criticism made toward them by Albanian Salafi Muslims and rejected any supposition suggesting their relationship with Iranian agencies, other than those promoting the cultural links and socio-cultural cooperation.

Foreign funded groups also tried to get a political representation on two different occasions, but both were rejected for incompatibility with the secular nature of the Albanian state and irregularities in the documentation (Vickers, 2008, p. 6).

#### **F. PAST TERRORIST THREATS TO ALBANIA**

All the NGOs mentioned earlier were connected with terrorists that were members of different terrorist groups, such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIG), the Algerian Islamic Armed Group (GIA), Iranian Intelligence cells (DoS, 1996), al Qaeda (DoS, 1999), etc. The GIA, a perpetrator of a series of attacks in Western Europe, was financed by Al Qaeda for a certain period (Nesser, 2008, p. 224), and its members operated mostly in Bosnia, but operatives of the Bosnian cell tried to establish a presence also in Albania (DoS, 2001). The most serious threat in matters of Islamic terrorism to Albania remains the threat presented by an Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIG) cell, which started to operate in the country in 1990 and reached the number of more than a dozen operatives in a few years. Their “accommodation” was provided by Islamic NGOs present in the country. The EIJ cell in Albania was led initially by Mohammed al-Zawahiri, the brother of Ayman al-Zawahiri, current leader of Al Qaeda, and at the time the leader of EIJ. He was employed as an engineer for IIRO since its establishment in the country. Consequently, the cell was headed by El-Sayed Abdel Maqsud and Shawqi Salama Mustafa Atiya. Mohammed also worked as an engineer for the Global Relief Organization office in Tirana, while Atiya was employed as a teacher in an orphanage funded by the RIHS. Most of the 20 reported members of the cell (Higgins & Cooper,

2001), were arrested by Albanian authorities and rendered to Egypt by 1999, where they were prosecuted during one of the most famous trials of the time there. The trial itself was often referred to as the trial of the “returnees from Albania.” The cell was disrupted in several consecutive raids on its safe houses in Tirana. Most of the terrorists were arrested and secretly rendered to Egypt, while a couple of them were reported to have escaped and one killed during the action (DoS, 1998).

The members of EIJ’s cell in Albania who were handed over to Egypt included: Husam Muhammad Khamis Nuwayr, aka Adil Anwar, Ahmad ‘Abd-al-Fattah Sayyid, Hasan Salih Mahmud, Shawqi Salama Mustafa Atiya, Ahmad Ibrahim al-Sayyid al-Naggar, aka Mohamed Ragab Foudah, Muhammad Hassan Tita, Ahmad Isma’il Uthman, Ahmed Refa’i Taha, Mohammad Zeki Mahjoub, Yassir al-Sirri, Magdi Ibrahim al-Sayyid al-Naggar, Abdel-Akher Hammad, El-Sayed Abdel-Maksud, Muhammad al-Islambouli, Khalid Abdullah, Mohammed Atef, Ahmed Osman Saleh, and Isam Muhammad Khalil, aka Ahmad Bakr. They were all responsible for terrorist attacks in Egypt and active plotters for further attacks. Another member of the cell was Essam Abdel-Tawwab, who had previously left Albania but was soon arrested in Sofia, Bulgaria. Returning to our NGOs employees, these individuals were employed at large, mainly by four charities in Albania: the AHF, the GIRF, the BIF, and the RIHS. They also specialized in different tasks. Atiya specialized in forging official documentation, especially passports and identity cards, while al-Naggar was the group’s propagandist. Hammad was a cleric and supposed to be also a propagandist of the Salafi Islam amongst Albanians within his reach during the time he stayed in Albania. Ahmed Taha was also a former emir of Gama’a al-Islamiyya, before it shrank into the EIJ. The employment of these individuals in Islamic charities was organized initially by Mohammed al-Zawahiri, who also charged Tita with collecting part of the salaries of the EIJ members in order to create a “special” fund. Tita later would organize the coming of both Atiya and Saleh in Albania.

For a long time there was a little known about their activities in Albania. Also, there is still no publicly disclosed information about the role of the donors for the Islamic charities on the employment of the EIJ members in Albania. A general explanation of this organized inward flow of jihadis in Albania recalls the opportunities presented by

Albania, as a potential safe haven for the wanted members of the EIJ, but also as a remedy for the lack funds of the organization. Higgins and Cooper (2001) on this perspective recall a meeting in the early 1990s of Ayman al-Zawahiri with another prominent member of the jihadi movement in Sana, Yemen, where he mentioned the severe lack of funds for the organization. From this perspective the open positions of the Islamic charities in Albania might have provided the necessary funds for the EIJ members. The later merging of the EIJ with bin Laden's Al Qaeda remains consistent with this explanation. The "merge" was well accepted also by the cell in Albania, as its announcement came by phone to the cell members, which were monitored by the Albanian intelligence service.

Higgins and Cooper (2001) described the group as a "sleeper" cell, but after the publication of further facts linked to the EIJ cell, it came up that the group was plotting an attack against the U.S. Embassy in Tirana. The 1999 closure of the American Embassy in Tirana and the evacuation of its personnel was due to the risks associated with other EIJ members who escaped or circumvented the 1998 counterterrorist operations (Binaj, 2004, p. 66). Those operations were not conducted without operational and political pressure. The EIJ, led by Ayman Al-Zawahiri, launched several public threats against Albanian authorities after the extradition of the cell members to Egyptian authorities.

#### **G. THE COUNTERTERRORISM ACTIONS OF THE ALBANIAN SECURITY FORCES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS**

The operation in the summer of 1998, which rounded up the EIJ members in Albania, had a pre-emptive nature, given the destabilization of Albania in the previous year, the spread of weapons amongst the population, and also because of the emerging conflict on the northeastern border in Kosovo. The arrests were conducted secretly and their extradition to Egypt was made possible by U.S. aircraft. The cooperation between Albanian and U.S. intelligence agencies has always been excellent, often going beyond the limits recognized by the Albanian law in regard to imprisonment or detainee rights (OSJI, 2013).

Despite of the lack of security and stability, due to previous internal disorders and the emergence of the Kosovo crisis in early 1999, Albanian authorities kept on pursuing suspected individuals engaged in terrorism. In late 1999 three foreigners, two Syrians and an Iraqi, had been arrested for suspected terrorist activities and later convicted on falsification charges. They were all expelled in June of the same year, after serving their short prison sentence. In October 1999, two individuals suspected of engaging in terrorism and having ties to Osama bin Laden were expelled from Albania by the authorities (DoS, 1999). The two were in Albania as missionaries of an Islamic humanitarian NGO dealing with refugee assistance. The names of the NGOs were not disclosed in public.

The counterterrorist operations of the late 1990s in Albania sought to annihilate the groups and individuals linked to terrorism that were operating the country, but less was done to counter their financial sources. Despite the clarity of the connection between Islamic foreign-funded charities, radical Islam spread among Albanians and the foreign terrorists connected with them. Beyond these initial efforts the jihadi “enterprise” was not annihilated in Albania.

The government’s action toward the Islamic NGOs was affected mainly by two factors. The first is connected to their wide engagement in humanitarian activities and their religious symbolism. The difficulty of shutting down these organizations “does not only affect the lives of people immediately connected with the humanitarian role of the charities but also affects the state’s image in matters of religion” (Lewitt & Jacobsen, 2007, p. 37). Albania had to face another difficulty on this issue, related to its international relations with the countries from where the money was coming. The Albanian government has profited itself from significant amounts of money from Islamic countries, which often finance costly infrastructural projects. Williams (2007) recognizes two main reasons in the difficulty of pursuing charities connected with terrorism: a general reticence on going after whoever sits behind the charities, and the flexibility of the charities to change their names and status making it difficult for state authorities to pursue them fast enough (pp. 76–77).



The assumptions are both right. With regard to the NGOs' flexibility to change their data or denomination, in Albania, this was verified with the AFH, which changed its denomination and status several times, until the authorities shut it down while it was known as "Jeta" (life, in Albanian).

The second factor that limited the Albanian counterterrorist response was due to the lack of proper organization and knowledge for conducting a large-scale counterterrorist finance operation. The counterterrorist finance operation in Albania started after the attacks of 9/11, but faced several difficulties. As reported by the U. S. Department of State (DoS) (2006) on the Albanian counterterrorist financing operations:

We note that the effectiveness of the government's counterterrorist financing efforts was hampered by inadequate financial resources, poor communications, a lack of data processing infrastructure, and the lack of experienced personnel due to frequent turnover.

Furthermore, the DoS (2007) determined that "the effectiveness of the government's counterterrorist financing effort was undermined by a lack of data-processing infrastructure and an inadequate capability to track and manage cases properly."

The DoS observations were made on the counterterrorist financing operations of the Albanian authorities from 2001 through 2005, when most of the Islamic NGOs were shut down, their accounts were frozen, and their foreign officials were deported to their countries of origin. The operations also included the freezing of private businesses owned by Arab businessmen, such as the Caravan Company of al-Qadi. In total, the assets that were frozen after those operations amounted to \$20 million (Kullolli, 2009, 47). In 2002 the country adopted a national counterterrorist plan, (Woehrel, 2005, p.6), and by 2004 signed all the 12 counterterrorist agreements at UN level, while improving national law in matters of terrorist funding and money laundering. Other counterterrorist finance operations included the running a nationwide check of means of stay of foreign nationals residing in the country, focusing especially on the documentation of foreigners coming from Arabic countries (ICG, 2001, p. 4). The law enforcement operation included also the identification and verification of staffs of several Islamic non-governmental

organizations, such as the Red Crescent, the Coordination Council of Islamic Associations, the Islamic World Committee and the Koran Foundation, besides the shutting down of the AHF, TWRA, BIF, and others. Further steps were taken in the private financial sector, by checking the financial transactions of Islamic financial institutions operating in the country, such as the Arab-Albanian Islamic Bank and the Malaysian Inter-commercial Bank and by checking other private financial institutions databases for suspicious transnational financial activities originating from Islamic countries. A few foreign employees of the Arab-Albanian Islamic Bank were arrested and deported to their home countries.

Moreover, especially after 9/11, many Islamic NGOs operating in Albania had vanished as their objectives were not met or their funds dried out, when Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states cracked down on individuals and organizations related with terrorism that had been funding those NGOs (Woehrel, 2005, p. 1). An example may be the Jeddah-based International Islamic Relief Organization (aka IGASA) or the Al-Qadi's Al Muwafaq Foundation.

## **H. JIHADI LEFTOVERS AND POTENTIAL THREATS**

Considering the events related to Islamic NGOs connected with terrorists in Albania as a particular “cycle of life” of the jihadi enterprise in a Balkan country, we find that this model applies similarly in all the Balkan countries, only through a different timeline. Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia, were flooded by Islamic NGOs in the early 1990s, while Kosovo experienced the same as soon as the war ended in 1999. The Saudi Joint Relief Committee for Kosovo (SJRCCK), a Saudi foundation, appeared in Kosovo in late 1999 and in the first two months alone initiated financing for nearly 400 of Islamist freelancers to propagate the “Saudi-way” of practicing Islam. It also attempted to “reconstruct” a mosque, when stopped by locals, who noticed the will of its contracted engineers in destroying ancient grave markers in the mosque's yard. Several other Islamic NGOs flooded the country in the years following the end of war. The financial inflow toward Kosovo from these organizations amounted to millions of dollars (U.S.) a year (ICG, 2001a, p. 6). Through their funding they sought to radicalize the population

and convert it to the Wahhabi and Salafi sects of Islam, which is totally different from a long secular tradition, and a very liberal form of Islam practiced by Albanians in Kosovo, and that is why the foreign efforts have not succeeded (DoS, 2004). The Saudi Joint Relief Committee for Kosovo has been the biggest disburser of funds for the reconstruction of new mosques in an Arabic-style, rather than in a traditional Turkish-Albanian architecture, providing scholarships and financing reclusive organizations (IGC, 2001, p. 20).

In 2001 the number of Islamic NGOs and charities in Kosovo was up to 30. An inflow of funds seeking to change the way Muslims practice Islam in the Balkans has been reported also from Macedonia and Montenegro, but to a lesser extent than that of Albania, Bosnia, and Kosovo. During the Kosovo war there was also an attempt made by Wahhabi mujahedeen, coming from the Bosnian war, to join the Kosovo conflict but they were refused immediately by Kosovo-Albanian leaders (Lederer, 2001, p. 5). Instead, given the circumstances they found several safe places in Kosovo and in Southern Serbia, which is inhabited by Muslim communities. Their presence and their organizations are not supported by any of the governments, but they quite often receive funds by Saudi funded NGOs operating in the countries (Vickers, 2008, p. 8).

In all Balkan countries the Islamic NGOs have exploited the social and economic situation of the countries to conduct their activities, often including the employment of foreign persons, and offering financial benefits to locals in exchange for promoting Salafi and Wahhabi Islam (Lederer, 2001, p. 16).

Despite their spread in the 1990s, following the 9/11 attacks the number of those organizations decreased immediately, especially after the closure of the most notorious of them after being accused of links with terrorist organizations. The stance of Arab countries was also important, since the funds that were being widely misused were derived from them. The Al Haramain office in Bosnia was designated in 2001 as a financer of terrorism and linked to bin Laden activities, not only by the U.S. authorities but also by Saudi Arabia. That made investigations easier and further funds or assets could be frozen in the Balkans (DoS, 2005). The Muwafaq Foundation, or Blessed Relief, founded by Yasin al-Qadi, an Osama bin Laden associate was also indicted on terrorism

charges. Al-Qadi was present in Albania not only with his charity but also as a businessman, with his several companies in the business of construction and transport (Comras, 2007, pp. 119–122). By 2004, all Balkan countries had adopted the UN regulations on counterterrorism and implemented several regulations in matters of financial control over suspicious funds and counterterrorist finance (Woehrel, 2005, p. 8).

Returning to the Albanian case, the successes of the physical crackdown on the EIJ cell, and of other individuals connected with terrorism activities in the pre-9/11 period, and the collective and simultaneous closure of Islamic NGOs and charities in the years 2001–2005, reduced the threat of terrorism in Albania only partially. The terrorism threat is a challenging issue given the inheritance of the decade-long jihadist engagement in the country. The risks presented are associated with the radicalization of the youth by mosques and community centers in which is professed a radical form of Islam often conflicting with the human rights and civil liberties laws of the country, but also by the appearance of jihadi-motivated websites and forums on the Internet. The mosques and centers are easily identified, since they are not operating under the authority of the AMC. Vickers reports that in 2008 there were 450–500 mosques operating outside the authority of the AMC, since they were built and being run by foreign funded organizations. Also, the number of students having studied in foreign Islamic countries, with very different religious traditions from Albania, has risen to 1500 (2008, p. 10). The challenge is to prevent radicalization and possible terrorist recruitment. Another risk is represented by the Albanian individuals who were associated and cooperated with the Islamic NGOs that were shut down. They were carefully selected by the foreign directors as being the most loyal to them, but none was indicted along with their foreign collaborators (Vickers, 2008, p. 10). The community of supporters of those NGOs may represent additional opportunities for leverage for future jihadi enterprises. The case of Artan Kristo, aka Mohamed Abdullahi, a former employee of AFH, who was indicted in 2009 for calling for jihad in Albanian Web forums, provides a good example of the radicalization of these individuals.

Another issue that should be considered is the general financial security environment in Albania, as well as in the wider region, which is still considered as a

financial haven for organized crime and governed by the most corrupt governments. In the case of Albania, Gjoni (2006) reports that the “Albanian organized crime groups have managed to infiltrate the government, assumed governmental functions, and neutralized law enforcement (p. 71). Albania is ranked as the country with the highest level corruption in the region (TI, 2013). Despite the elimination of the threat posed by well-organized terrorist groups that operated in the country in the 1990s, the actual counterterrorism efforts should be focused on the prevention of terrorist financing and radicalization, which may enable occasional targeting of Albanian objectives. Nesser (2008) provides a chronology of jihadism in Europe and identifies three different roles of Europe in relation to jihad. He maintains (p. 925) that from 1994 to 1996 Europe functioned as an arena for local jihad, from 1998 to 2004 as an arena for global jihad, and finally, from 2003 to 2004 and following, as a target for global jihad.

Strengthening the rule of law and exercising major control on foreign-funded NGOs is fundamental in preventing radicalization of terrorist recruitment. As stated in an ICG report on the Balkans (2001):

It appears that only Bosnia has significant numbers of potential Islamist extremists. Elsewhere the potential for Islamist-inspired violence seems slight, and to hinge on the weakness of institutions rather than ideological sympathies with the enemies of the West. (p. i)

A subsequent ICG report (2005) appraises the counterterrorism effort of the Balkan countries, but it mentions the need for special emphasis on the democratic performances of these countries and a substantial improvement of the state of law, in order to counter effectively terrorist efforts.

## **I. CONCLUSIONS: CHALLENGES FOR THE PRESENT AND FUTURE**

The 1998 counterterrorist operation, which disrupted a “sleeper cell” of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad in Tirana, targeted foreign individuals hiding in Albania and operating disguised as charity workers. As Higgins and Cooper (2001) report, Mohamed Zawahri, brother of the al Qaeda’s chief Ayman al Zawahri, was responsible since the early 1992 for organizing the incoming and housing foreign jihadis as charity workers of the Islamic Relief Organization. The IIRO was not the only NGO serving as a

communion place for the Egyptian Jihad members. Al Haremei was also eager to offer jobs to recommended foreigners. The initial strategy adopted by the Albanian government, supported also by the U.S. government, was to exploit these networks and obtain as much information as possible on them. This strategy changed as soon as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad merged with bin Laden's al Qaeda, and subsequently tried to attack the local U.S. embassy (Clarke, 2004), but also in light of the deterioration of the internal political and security situation in Albania. The then-newly-formed al Qaeda cell was disrupted without having a chance to engage in violent actions, and its leaders were deported to Egypt and elsewhere. The operation also drew attention to al Qaeda's leadership, which released a public condemnation note along with the promise to retaliate. The later counterterrorist finance measures, starting from 2001 and ending in 2005, cut the funds and shut down NGOs and charities affiliated with terrorist organizations.

Since 2005 there have been no major counterterrorist operations in Albania known to the public, but the terrorist threat is present due to a number of factors. First, the community of Albanian nationals which developed relationships with foreign jihadis in the past is quite numerous, and several exponents of them have since been indicted on terrorism charges. Artan Kristo, the online jihadi activist, previously employed by the AHF is an example. Second, a radical form of Islam is still being professed in Albania by foreign-educated Islamic preachers in mosques outside the national religious institution's influence. While these preachers tend to carefully disguise their radical points of view, an avid propaganda campaign is being conducted on the Internet. The aforementioned preachers tend to openly criticize the liberal form of Islam practiced in Albania (and Kosovo, Macedonia, and elsewhere), while often engaging in radical discourse, which challenges common narratives about the state laicism, security concerns, and international relations involving Albania and other countries, especially Kosovo and Macedonia. The immediate goal of this activity is to radicalize Albanians, while in some cases it has been a precursor to criminal and terrorist activities conducted or planned by militants of the radical and jihadi-inspired form of Islam promoted openly on the Internet,

and semi-covertly in the physical world. (See Gilaj (2012), Express (2012), Indeks Online (2013)).

Third, the jihadi propaganda developed through the preaching in selected religious institutions and the widespread Internet-based propaganda has managed to convert many Albanian Muslims to a more radical Islam. This can be verified first by noticing the quantity and quality of jihadi information operations in Albanian, and second, by noticing real life examples of Albanians embracing the jihadi narrative and acting accordingly. The examples of the Albanian victims killed in the Syrian conflict, where they are reported to have joined the Al-Nusra Front, a terrorist organization affiliated with al Qaeda, and the reports of tens of others who have joined the ranks of that organization make the case for concern (Biçaku, 2013; Al-Arnaout, 2013; Ninkovic, 2013).

The challenges presented by the terrorist threat to Albanians should be managed by obtaining accurate intelligence on the factors that drive Albanian nationals into the jihad. While traditional intelligence gathering methods are fundamental, the analyzing of the jihadi narratives and information operations on the Internet are equally important.

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## **V. ANALYSIS OF JIHADI INFORMATION OPERATIONS IN THE ALBANIAN LANGUAGE ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

### **A. PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

There have been several attempts to study jihadist Internet strategies and operations, and there is a lot of research going on for providing security agencies with technical products that make data from social networking sites easier to analyze. Given the difficulty of extracting representative samples or analyzing the whole Web in order to analyze the effectiveness of jihadist propaganda, most of the studies conducted have a descriptive profile rather than an analytical one. This is due to the difficulties of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting raw data collected from the Internet in general, and social networking sites in particular. The anonymity provided by the Internet and the impossibility of verifying the trustworthiness of the information spread through Internet applications contribute to uncertainties of interpretation of the analysis conducted using that data. The same characteristics also define the efforts to analyze the jihadi presence on the Web. Bunt (2003) underlines the difficulties in determining location and timing of the upload of online information by users and the global dimension of propagation of information, and introduces the term e-jihad for describing the jihadist Web-based information flow (pp. 25–28). Despite these difficulties there are some attempts that offer logical explanations supported by limited data sets.

Janbeck and Prado (2012) conducted research between 2009 and 2010 in an attempt to analyze the discursive strategies and representations of virtual communities of a few dozen terrorist-related websites. They agreed with the general assertion that the Internet is used by terrorists to disseminate propaganda, organize the membership, communicate information, fundraise, and recruit new members (p. 23) and provide documented argumentation of that. Despite the limited number of websites they analyzed, they noted that none of these websites offered interactive content, such as chat rooms, forums, etc. They explained this lack of service as a cautious choice by terrorists, in order to maintain a tight control of the discourse over the Web. Nonetheless, the websites were

interconnected with other websites with similar content Webs (p. 24). The research conducted by them is a model that offers insights within a restricted area. Although they analyzed only websites, and not any other Internet sources or platforms, their format may also be used for analyzing social networking site profiles or pages.

Another way of conducting social networking analysis is proposed by Weisburd (2012), who proposes an “artisanal approach” model. His artisanal approach consists of an individual approach to track and analyze the imprint of suspected terrorists in social networking sites, without any specific agenda, just a willingness to follow any traces of suspected profiles. However, he limits the effectiveness of this approach solely to individuals who may alert investigators by explicitly showing online the extremist side of their identity, or by being members of dark networks on the Web.

Gerger and Strathearn (2013) approach the challenge by setting up a scoring system in order to find out which social media accounts (they focus mainly on Twitter) within a specific extremist circle are most influential and most prone to influence and call the tendency to exposure (i.e., how many tweets) (p. 3). They identify as influence the tendency of a user to inspire a measurable reaction from other users, such as replies, re-tweets, etc. (p. 4). As defined by them, a cumulative measure, which is the interactivity, is obtained from the sum of influence and exposure scores. After analyzing a number of social media accounts belonging to nationalist Internet users, they find that only 1% of the accounts tend to be influential, that influence and exposure are highly correlated, and that users scoring high in terms of interactivity are highly engaged ideologically.

Conway and McNerney (2008) have conducted similar research on YouTube and gathered data found on jihadi channels, which they analyzed through descriptive statistics and basic social networking analyses techniques. In their study the authors focus more on providing evidence of the jihadis’ interaction with the public and among themselves rather than researching influence factors. Also Bermingham (et al., n.d.) apply social network analysis to explore the potential for online radicalization in jihadi channels on YouTube, but they also apply sentiment analysis for the purpose.

Zelin and Fellow (2013) also mention the paucity of research conducted for understanding how the jihadi activists propagate their messages on the Web. They identify a decline in the use of forums as a primary channel of public communication by jihadis and an increasing use of social networking sites. They recognize that social networking sites present more complexities than traditional forums, in which jihadis have largely been focused earlier, and they also focus on using descriptive statistics in gathering intelligence for analyzing the jihadi performance on the Web.

Wathen and Burkell (2002) contribute indirectly to the effort by providing a theoretical model that deals with explaining how credibility is established during the interaction of users and the information found on line. Although the research approaches the problem from the user's perspective it is also relevant to determine the potential of the uploaded content. Figure 1, which is taken from the authors study, explains in detail how cognitive processes are developed by the users in order to trust the information found on the website. The authors maintain that the assessment of credibility of Internet information is iterative and it develops through three stages (p. 142).

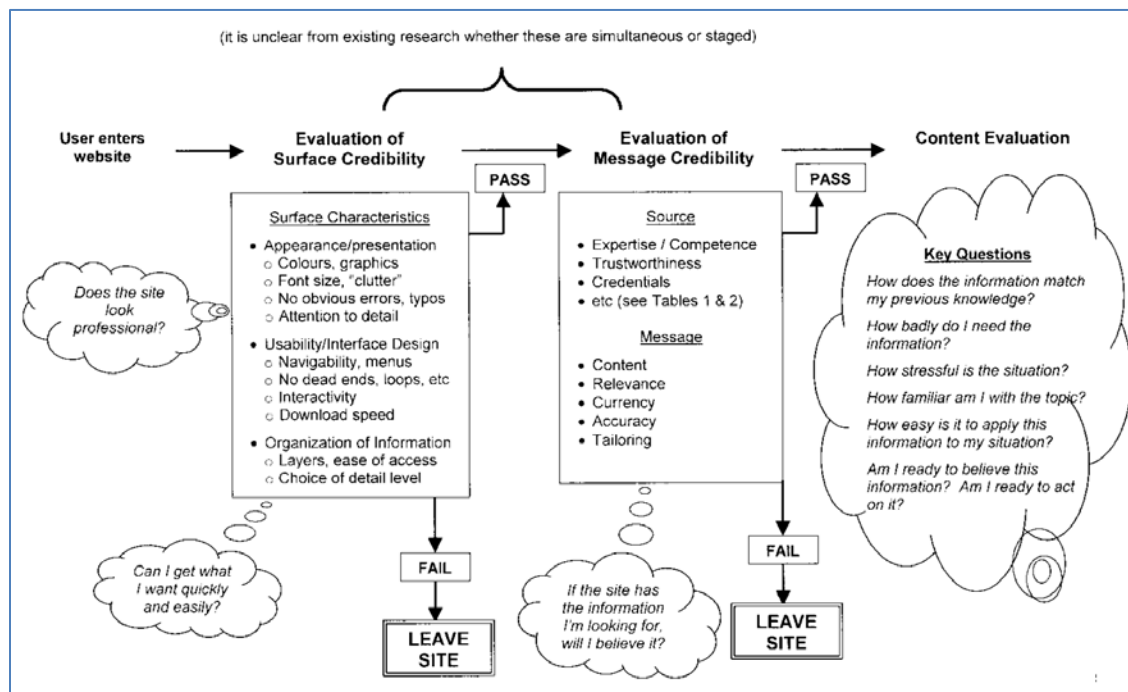


Figure 1. Model of how users judge the credibility of online information (from Wathen and Burkell, 2002, p. 141).

In the first stage the user evaluates the surface characteristics of the site. Here the appearance, the interface design, the download speed, and interactivity offered by the site are key factors on which the visitor develops his first impression. The authors maintain that this step is a pass/fail one; practically speaking, if the visitor does not like what he sees first, he is going to leave the website. In the second stage the visitor analyzes the credibility of the message, evaluating the content, the source and its credentials, the accuracy, currency, and relevancy of the information found, and he will also evaluate the pertinence of the information found. During this stage the visitor “skims” the information, decides if it is generally important for his purposes and accurate enough, and then proceeds to the next step. If the website does not pass the second stage, the visitor most likely would leave it. In the case the visitor is interested, he will proceed to the third and last step. Here the visitor is more focused and pays a lot more attention to the information provided by the website. At this stage, completeness and details become powerful factors.

Besides individual approaches in analyzing jihadi uses of social networking sites there are also more organized platforms in place that serve as databases of jihadi content collected from social networking sites. The Dark Web Forum Portal (Chen, et al., n.d.) is an example of this kind of effort.

Even so, to date there is no commonly accepted and substantial methodology or analytical approach to determine why some jihadist information operations are successful and others are not. A reason for that might be the continuously evolving nature of the Internet, and especially the difficulty of researcher to follow-up its evolution and adopt the analytical methodologies in order to exploit opportunities offered by the social networking sites, which have become the melting pot of every single type of use previously distributed meticulously in separate applications of the Internet.

Everton (2012) recognizes the growing importance of social media and the potential for a proper study of them (p. 70) while assessing that the techniques of collecting and processing data obtained from them are in their infancy (p. 71). In fact, the tools available for the study of social networking sites consist of computer programs able to track, collect, and process the data gathered through social networking sites or through

the Web. These programs enable researchers or investigators to find and structure data, but do not provide further qualitative analysis, which is left to the human analyst. The data-structuring and the resulting analysis itself are also dependent on human assumptions, which are often based on factors deriving from incomplete research on the jihadis' use of the Internet al.so, another risk of automatic collection and data-structuring programs may be leaving behind important information. Despite that, raw data needs explanation and proper coding. Following the collection and structuring of data, the biggest problem for the human operator is to give them the meaning that they have in the real world. The same problems are also faced for conducting a thorough analysis of jihadi information operations on social networking sites.

Since the current evolution of technology does not allow any exhaustive automated research and analysis of all the jihadi content present in social networking sites, alternate ways of dealing with the problem are needed. A way around conducting research and obtaining accurate analysis on those kinds of uses of the Internet might be the identification of important factors and characteristics, which may help researchers and analysts to identify smaller and qualitative sets of data, eliminate redundancies, and obtain better intelligence. The methodology, which is elaborated on in this chapter, seeks to identify those factors and characteristics, and at the same time, sets an example on how to approach the challenge of analyzing jihadi information strategies.

## **B. ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS IN THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF PROMINENT JIHADIS ON THE USE OF THE INTERNET**

The approach for analyzing potential success or failure of jihadi information operations on social networking sites should take into account two major influential factors: first, the recommendations made by prominent jihadi ideologues over the public image of the jihad, and second, the exploitation of the social networking site capabilities by jihadis. The jihadi ideologues' viewpoints on information management, although of a rhetorical nature most of the time, especially when related to the traditional and high-level leadership, can be framed in order to be operationalized for further analysis. Along with the interpretation of the jihadi leadership recommendations from an operational perspective, it is worthy to mention that ideological divisions over the issue of the

organization (centralized vs. decentralized) for the jihad do not influence ideological perspectives on the management of the information or mediatic jihad. Recommendations of this nature have to be accepted and expected to be complementary to each other, independently from the source.

Regarding the previous research and analysis of the scriptures and public messages of prominent jihadi ideologues, we have found the following elements within their recommendations that apply for the conduct of a successful jihadi information operation:

- The element of quantity and outreach – This twofold element can be noticed in the recommendations of every prominent jihadi ideologue. Framed for the purpose of the analysis of jihadi information operations on social networking sites, this element presupposes that jihadi activists should fill the Internet with jihadi material, in as many outlets as possible in order to reach an optimal audience.
- The element of networking – Prominent jihadis recommend that the spread of the call to jihad is a common effort. On this matter al-Suri and al-Salim are the most prolific and offer detailed recommendations. Framed for the purpose of this study, this element assumes that in order to achieve success jihadis should actively participate in the common effort to spread jihadi content over the Internet, provide feedback, expand, and share the materials through different outlets.
- The element of specific tailoring – Prominent jihadis recommend that for a successful jihadism on the Web the communications should be tailored to their specific audience. This element presupposes that jihadi information operations shall tend toward matching narratives, using local languages and symbolism.
- The element of audiovisual exploitation of the media – Prominent jihadis recognize the power of properly arranged messages. This element presupposes that higher audiovisual editing standards and originality provide higher chances of success.

These elements, in this form, may provide to researchers and analysts a theoretical explanation of the factors for potential success of jihadi information operations, but in order to be used for analytical purposes they need to be operationalized. The operationalization of these elements is done through a process that takes into account the current developments and opportunities offered by the Internet, and in our case, the social networking sites. Generally speaking, social networking sites provide users with publicly available data on the performance of other users' postings, or other users' activity on the site. The user may as well choose to remain anonymous or restrict the release of his data to third parties, but for our purposes that is a nonsense situation, since our object of study is focused on extroversive uses of social networking sites. In Table 2 we provide the data which are easily obtained by visiting two major social networking sites,<sup>7</sup> YouTube and Facebook, and which may help to measure the elements of performance of jihadi information operations:

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<sup>7</sup> The same type of data can also be obtained on a case-by-case basis from other traditional websites, Web logs, or not previously mentioned social networking sites.

Elements	YouTube	Facebook
Quantity and outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- #Views;<sup>8</sup></li> <li>- #Likes;</li> <li>- #Dislikes;</li> <li>- #Subscriptions driven by post;</li> <li>- #Shares;</li> <li>- Time watched;</li> <li>- #Comments;</li> <li>- #Videos posted by user;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- #status, photos, videos, published;</li> <li>- #Likes;</li> <li>- #Shares;</li> <li>- #Comments;</li> </ul>
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Usernames of other users that have interacted/responded to postings of the original user;</li> <li>-Web links (or hyperlinks) to other websites, social networking sites user profiles;</li> <li>-Names of organization/group/individual mentioned in the postings;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Usernames of other users that have interacted/responder to postings of the original user;</li> <li>- Web links to other websites, social networking sites user profiles;</li> <li>- Names of organization/group/individual mentioned in the postings;</li> </ul>
Specific tailoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Language used (or dialects);</li> <li>- Date of posting (to match with important local events);</li> <li>- Topic;</li> <li>- Name of user;</li> <li>- Location of user;</li> <li>- Other data (Description section);</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Language used (or dialects)</li> <li>- Date of posting (to match with important local events);</li> <li>- Topic;</li> <li>- Name of user;</li> <li>- Location of user;</li> <li>- Other data (About section);</li> </ul>
Audiovisual exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality of editing;</li> <li>- Audiovisual quality;</li> <li>- Branding;</li> <li>- Length of video;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality of editing;</li> <li>- Audiovisual quality;</li> <li>- Branding;</li> </ul>

Table 2. Measurement data of jihadi recommended elements for success of jihadi information operations.

<sup>8</sup> The sign “#” stands for “number of.”



The measurement data reported in Table 2 can be collected mostly as they are shown on the Web spaces of social networking sites.<sup>9</sup> Some of the measurements may have to be coded by the researcher, such as the “Quality of editing” and the “Audiovisual quality.” The “quality of editing” may be coded by assignment of points. An example might be: 4 points for material showing messages released by members (conational, in-group) of the target audience; 3 points for material that is edited by including a voiceover in the language of the target audience; 2 points for material that is edited by including subtitles in the language of the target audience; 1 point for material in a foreign language, without translations or special editing to make it more comprehensible to the target audience. The “audiovisual quality” may be coded through a simple scale, such as: 3 points for high quality material; 2 points for average quality material; 1 point for poor quality material.

The collection of measurement data of the elements recommended from prominent jihadis for the success of the jihadi information operations may provide detailed information for each jihadi information operation on social networking site, but to identify factors of success or failure needs further processing. At this point the identification of these factors may be done through building a dataset with data from jihadi information operations and mining through the data. The data obtained on the quantity and outreach element is of fundamental value. It is important not only because it is quantified numerically, but also because the bigger the audience, the greater the chances of success of jihadi information operations on social networking sites. Yet, in itself the measure does not provide any qualitative analysis. By comparing the measures of the quantity and outreach elements with the measures of other elements through the use of different methods of analysis, it is possible to obtain qualitative insights on the overall performance of each jihadi information operations compared to others. By this approach it is possible to observe trends and patterns of performance based on the two

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<sup>9</sup> Of course other data may be obtained through social networking sites, simply by visiting the Web spaces of interest, but I report here the data which is easier to identify, obtain, code and process for further analysis.

major influential factors mentioned earlier: the suggestions of prominent jihadi leaders and a realistic quantitative dataset extracted from the social networking sites, where common jihadis and their sympathizers conduct their part in the jihad.

### **C. BUILDING AND ANALYZING THE DATASET**

Beside the theoretical and textual-historical approach in identifying factors of success or failure in the conduction of jihadi information operations on the Internet, to obtain better results in the study, we build a dataset, which help to test empirically determined factors quantitatively and qualitatively. The building of a dataset for this purpose faces a few challenges, which are described briefly in the following subsection..

#### **1. Where To Start?**

First and foremost, it must be determined from which social networking site data from jihadi-inspired content on social networking sites will be obtained. We chose YouTube, the first major user-generated content website, but also one of the most visited social networking sites. YouTube is widely used by jihadists or their sympathizers to spread audiovisual content serving the purposes of the jihad. Kohlmann (2011) recalls the potential of YouTube as a radicalization tool in the hands of the terrorists. Weimann (2011) also refers to YouTube as the first choice of jihadis to communicate with the public, while he considers some messages from prominent jihadis that discourage their sympathizers from using Facebook, another major social networking site, since it is considered a dangerous and potentially corrupt platform.

YouTube is also the third most-visited website in Albania, following Facebook and Google (Alexa, 2013). The first in the ranking of most-visited websites by Albanians is Facebook, which is also a social networking site, but we chose YouTube because of its presence in the market earlier, higher perceived anonymity of operation, and because it is a preferred platform for jihadists to conduct their information operations.

In addition, we chose Albania, because it is better suited to the purposes of our research. Use of the Internet in Albania is above the world average, and almost equivalent to average usage in the European region. Albania's history and challenges in matters of

terrorism and radicalization are better described in Chapter II, and in line with the concepts introduced in Chapter III, Albania, from a technical perspective, may be described as a country where the Internet penetration levels are satisfactory, and the IC community has a potential for developing intelligence gathering methodologies and countering strategies against the uses of the Internet for jihadism purposes.

## **2. Local Language-Driven Research**

Gunaratna (2002) in analyzing al Qaeda as an international organization maintains that although it is an internationally operating entity, its affiliates tend to operate locally and recruit from “among their own nationalities, families and friends” (p.129). This is quite logical. Such is also our intent to start by focusing on jihadi information operations in the Albanian language. The Albanian language is a unique language that is spoken by the Albanian population in Albania, Kosovo, FYROM, and Montenegro, and by Albanian populations living in other countries. No other nation in the world speaks Albanian naturally. For the purposes of this research, by looking for jihadi information operations in Albanian, a researcher automatically identifies the target audience. By researching and identifying jihadi information operations in the same language the researcher also obtains a highly representative sample within the global “population” of jihadi information operations. Sageman (2004) affirms that the language serves as a useful limiting factor (p. 162) in building a consistent sample of jihadist propaganda. In addition a language-driven research makes the research easier and more consistent.

The research can be started by using keywords in the pre-established language matching with the object of research. We use only one keyword: jihad, which in Albanian is written “xhihad” and spelled the same as in English. Actually other than the little change in the written word, it makes a substantial change when researching into the site’s search engine. For other languages it may be different. A way around that may be to research through other combinations of words recalling some jihadi activity, or individuals, events, places, etc. We stick to the “xhihad” search results (see Figure 2).

The search engine identifies 4610<sup>10</sup> results. The result represents the number of times the word is found throughout the YouTube database, not the quantity of videos addressing the subject. The word jihad may be found within the video's titles, within the “about” section of each video, within the “comments” section, and may even be a username as well. The number of videos that are of interest for the research purpose is much smaller. At the end of the research, only 84 videos would fulfill the requirements to be processed for data collection.

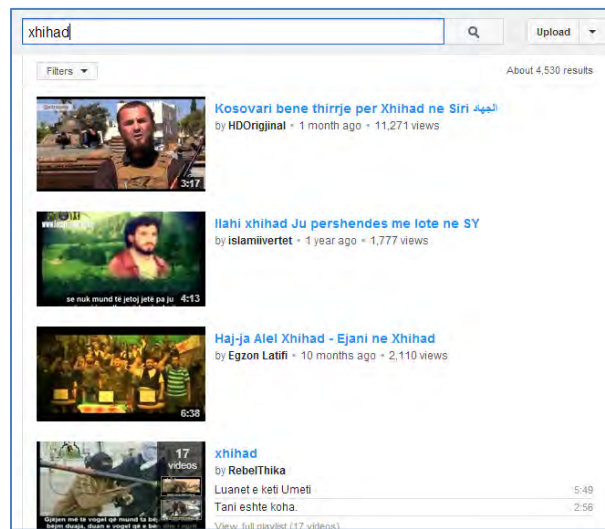


Figure 2. A screenshot of the search results by using the keyword “xhihad” (Alb.) in YouTube.

Of course these videos show up first, if the researcher applies the “relevancy” filter, set up by YouTube. The relevancy filter makes possible the appearance first of videos containing the word jihad in their titles, usernames, and then the videos in which the word jihad is found more times within the video's Web space (“about” and “comments” section). The research is exhausted within the evaluation (subject-driven research) of the first 200 videos appearing first after the query, but immediate results can be noticed as soon as the word jihad does not appear any more in the titles. Of course, there might be other videos treating the same subject, which are left out of the research,

<sup>10</sup> Last check conducted on November 22, 2013. Retrieved from: [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=xhihad&sm=12](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=xhihad&sm=12)

but that does not make for an issue of concern. The goal here is to attract and influence as many users as possible. These users need to be “pulled first” into the video space, and to do so, the use of keywords within the title of the video is the most logical choice. In terms of Wathen and Burkell’s study (2002) it also provides a better “surface credibility.” In some cases users might have decided to unsubscribe from appearing on public searches, but this also is excluded from the interest of the research, since the research is focused on what is public and meant to be so.

### **3. A Subject Driven Research**

The keyword search exploits the automated services provided by social networking sites, but it also generates problems, especially in regard to the subject and the meaningfulness of the found object compared to the purpose of the study. The word jihad has an ambiguous meaning. Generally, it does not have the meaning which is promoted by al Qaeda and affiliated organizations. Due to this ambiguity the original search might not be as accurate as needed for the purposes of the analysis. At this point it is necessary to determine which videos deserve to be identified as jihadi information operations, rather than simple YouTube videos.

According to Hoffman (in Weimann, 2006) al Qaeda’s jihadi propaganda “has three basic themes: the West is implacably hostile to Islam; the only way to address the West is in the language of violence; and jihad is the only way for true believers” (p. 44). This explanation is quite clear, but these elements do not have to concur altogether to characterize a communication as convenient from an al Qaeda sympathizer. Since the crackdown on al Qaeda in Afghanistan, many jihadi organizations have franchised al Qaeda’s cause and methodology, and they shape their messages according to proper needs, often framed carefully in a way to be more compelling to the public. A jihadi-inspired communication (information operation) may contain concurrently facts, jihadi rhetoric, religious rhetoric, religious verses, and other parts that may not be considered illegal in the target audience. Jihadi content on social networking sites in the Albanian language, most times, do not approach the public with full-fledged al Qaeda-type propaganda, as noted by Hoffman, rather, the jihad is framed carefully and often

disguised with harmless religious verses. At this point the researcher needs to be very careful which content to identify as jihadi information operations. In selecting the videos showing up from the initial search to include in our jihadi information operations database we consider if they fulfill the general conditions mentioned by Hoffman, but also consider elements forbidden by local laws in regards to inciting violence, discrimination, or the use of offensive language. We also identify as jihadi information operations the videos which promote a code of conduct condemned by local religious authorities, such as segregation and discrimination based on religious patterns, but also videos which promote important actions against the recommendations of the local religious leaders, such as the call to join the jihad in Syria. The participation of Albanians in the internal conflict of Syria, through the framing of it as a religious duty, is a salient problem nowadays in the Albanian-populated regions of the Balkans. In conclusion, our database also includes videos that seek the moral disengagement of the public and their recruitment into the jihadi cause, no matter if there is no direct call for violent action. The theory of selective moral disengagement has been elaborated by Albert Bandura (in Weimann, 2006) and it explains that in order to act people have to initially justify the morality of their actions (pp. 54–55). Weimann has adapted Bandura's theory in order to detect a few rhetorical tactics used by terrorists to convince its recruits or potential recruits for engaging in terrorism. These tactics consist of distorting the relationship between the individual's behavior and its outcome, distributing the responsibility, dehumanizing the targets, using euphemistic language, making advantageous comparisons, distorting sequences of events, and attributing the blame to the victims (pp. 55–56).

The identification and selection of the results showing up from the initial search query might seem a difficult one, but it is worthy, since it allows the identification of YouTube channels, which can be made available for further analysis. Also, sometimes the process is very smooth since often jihadi-inspired videos are branded, either by the mentioning up-front of terrorist organizations or signature brands of jihadi media

organizations.<sup>11</sup> Of course, the more familiar the researcher is with this sort of material, the easier it is to process the dataset. This step follows the principles of Weisburd's "artisanal approach" and it is somewhat time-consuming,<sup>12</sup> but to date there is no other automated way for obtaining data of similar quality.

#### **4. Creating the Dataset**

Once the jihadi information operations are identified properly it is necessary to extract data from within them in order to be in the dataset in a form that enables the researcher to conduct analysis.

The data that we collect reflects the measurement data which are mentioned in the Table 2 and are in regard to the YouTube social networking site. An Excel spreadsheet is used to collect the data. The spreadsheet's top row reflects the measuring values for the elements of success as recommended by prominent jihadi leaders. It is important to note that the research is video-based not channel-based. YouTube allows users to establish their own channels where they can air videos. Since the search on the search engine was conducted for videos (users can also research channels) containing the word jihad in Albanian, we focus on them. A detailed explanation of the data expected to be retrieved from exploring YouTube is found in the following paragraphs.

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<sup>11</sup> In some cases during the research some videos were easy to exclude because they were not related to the jihad: some Albanian users of YouTube are named "Xhihad" (first name) and the videos uploaded by them kept showing as relevant, because of their names. We also excluded videos uploaded by national news channels, which use YouTube as a tool to upload and share video news, and also videos uploaded by well-known Albanian religious figures explaining concepts related with the jihad.

<sup>12</sup> In this case, the research (the query, the evaluation, and the collection of data into the prepared spreadsheet) took nearly 18 hours. We spent most of that time evaluating and processing the first 200 videos out of 660 in total. The remaining videos were easily to evaluate and discard from the research. We spent mostly 10–15 minutes for each video that fulfilled the criteria for further procession.

a. *Quantity and Outreach*

- Number of views: A numerical value which is reported for each video uploaded on the site. It reports the exact number of times a video has been requested to be watched by YouTube users. No matter if the video has been entirely viewed or it has been viewed multiple times by the same user (only if accessed through different access points, because YouTube does not count the viewings from the same access point, or same IP address, separately), the value retrieved would mean for the purposes of this analysis the numerical value of the attraction it has exercised for the whole period of the video has been present on YouTube.
- Number of likes and/or dislikes: YouTube allows users to express their feelings about the videos by providing them two options: the like (thumb up) and dislike (thumb down). Each user may “vote” only once and decide whether he likes or dislikes the video. In order for users to express their feelings it is necessary to sign in through a Google account, since the site would not allow unregistered users to do that. This numerical value can also be interpreted as a stronger sign of attraction or repulsion, since the user engages with the content and provides feedback. These measures provide a more qualitative insight into the public performance of the video, rather than the number of views measure, given the greater effort put out by users to produce it.
- Number of subscriptions driven by post: A numerical value which reports the number of users that subscribed to the channel that contains the video, because of the same video. This measure can also be used for analyzing the channel’s performance.
- Time watched: This measure reports the cumulative time spent by users by watching a video. This measure is actually even better than the previous ones in matters of identifying the real interest of users toward the video. (Some users might just take a quick look and be counted as viewers the same as others who watch the video entirely. The quick viewers might also prejudice the video and express their feelings by liking or disliking it without waiting to watch the video until it ends.) This measure does not reflect the length of the video, which is a different measure.
- Number of shares: This measure reflects the number of times the video is shared by other users who do not need to be YouTube registered users.



- Number of comments: This measure reflects the number of responses a video has generated. Only YouTube registered users can comment, although others may see the postings of the earlier viewers.
- Number of videos posted by YouTube registered user: This measure reflects the number of videos posted on the channel. Only YouTube registered users are allowed to upload videos, and when they do, they automatically are considered as channels, rather than simple users. Of course this does not change anything from the perspective of the YouTube registered user since a user who has not uploaded a video can use the site the same as “channels.”

***b. Networking***

- Usernames of users interacting with the “channel:” This type of data consists of the usernames of other users interacting (writing comments) with a specific channel. The site policy does not allow users to share their usernames. The collection of this data enables the research to conduct social network analysis. Of course, only registered users are allowed to comment on YouTube.
- Hyperlinks: YouTube channels or users may promote their videos or direct the audience into other Web spaces by posting Web links on their video spaces, or in the comments section. In building the dataset we first include a Yes/No column to indicate the presence or absence of hyperlink, then we collect the hyperlinks found in the videos showing from the results of the initial search. The linking/promotion of websites within the content produced by the users in their social media accounts is noted also by Gerger and Strathern (2013).
- Names mentioned: We review titles of videos and comments in search of names of individuals, groups, or organizations that are mentioned within them. Those names are collected in a separate spreadsheet indication as well as the channel where it was found, and the user who mentioned the name. This data will be used for social networking analysis purposes.

*c. Specific Tailoring*

- Language used: A quick overview of the video allows understanding whether the video contains information in the target language or not. This is a Yes/No type of observation. In case the language is same as the target language, then a second observation determines the type of dialect used. In this case, being a native Albanian, it is easy to identify the two main dialects of the Albanian language, the Gheg (common in the Northern Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro) and the Tosk (common in the Southern and Central Albania).
- Date of publication: This data reflects the date of publication of the video showing from the initial search. This kind of data may allow researchers to conduct temporal analysis.
- Topic: This data is retrieved through a subjective determination. We establish sets of subjects of which might recur in conducting the research. The sets may be pre-established or re-established as the research goes on. We pre-establish six subject-based sets which are:
  - Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts related – Here fall the videos that report events occurring in Iraq and Afghanistan.
  - Syria conflict related – Here fall the videos reporting events occurring in Syria, or calling for joining the jihad in Syria.
  - Hate speech toward local customs in matters of religion – Here fall the videos containing hate speech toward local religious and cultural customs.
  - Western and Israeli hostility toward Islam – Here fall videos reporting the supposed hostility of Western countries (i.e., the United States) and Israel toward Islamic countries or Muslims around the world.
  - Promotion of jihadism without a specific context – Here fall videos calling for joining the jihad, promoting jihadism, and emphasizing the profits of embracing jihad, but without a specific context.
  - Appearance of prominent jihadi leaders – Here fall all the videos showing prominent jihadi leaders addressing the public. As Holbrook (2013) mentions:

For the Al Qaeda leadership, this relates not only to contextualization and legitimization of past attacks or violent campaigns. Messages to the wider public must also demonstrate the continued relevancy of opinions and

options presented by the leadership and its ability to address concerns of those for whom the appeals are generated. (p. 886)

Here we also identify whether the videos reflect a local presence or not. The local presence may be a recording within Albanian borders, or the presence of individuals from Albanian origin who are communicating one of the above topics.

- Name of user (channel owner): The name of the channel owner is checked if it is a traditional Albanian name, or else.
- Location of user: YouTube allows channel owners to report the location from where they are interacting. We collect this data if present.

***d. Audiovisual Exploitation***

- Quality of editing: The “quality of editing” may be coded by assignment of points. We apply the following system: 4 points, to material communicating messages released by members (conational) of the target audience; 3 points, to the material that is edited by including a voiceover in the language of the target audience; 2 points, to the material that is edited by including subtitles in the language of the target audience; 1 point, material in a foreign language, without translations or special editing to make it more comprehensible to the target audience.
- Audiovisual quality: This measure is coded through a simple scale: 3 points for high quality material; 2 points for average quality material; 1 point for poor quality material. This is a subjective determination, and thus it is recommended to keep the coding simple.
- Branding: This measure is recorded through a Yes/No type of determination and reports whether internationally recognized jihadi badges are branding the video.

Since the collection process includes the recording of a significant number of data it is recommended to set up the order of measures in the Excel spreadsheet as it fits better to the researcher’s needs.

#### **D. RESULTS FROM THE DATASET ANALYSIS**

The dataset obtained through the collection on YouTube contains data from 84 videos which are identified as jihadi information operations. Of course there may be other videos that may be identified as jihadi information operations if the search is conducted with other keywords in Albanian,<sup>13</sup> but it goes beyond the purpose of this study. This study seeks to set an example on how research might be conducted to identify and test factors of success in jihadi information operations on the social media rather than analyzing the YouTube-based jihadism in the Albanian language.

The data obtained from the collection process is quite vast and leaves room for different types of analysis.<sup>14</sup> For the purpose of this study we conducted analysis that tests the factors of success recommended by prominent jihadi leaders for the conduct of jihadi information operations on the Internet.

The analysis is conducted by identifying the element of “quantity and outreach” as an independent variable. It is fundamental for the jihadis, above all, to “speak and to be heard,” independent of how it is done. The production and the spread of jihadi messages are fundamental to the overall success of the jihad, since it not only communicates the jihadi ideology but also influences the recruitment and donations to the cause. In the social networking sites domain, if jihadi information operations approach as many social networking site users as possible then it is considered that they have successfully fulfilled their mission.

As to the build-up of the dataset, the element of quantity and outreach in YouTube was set to be represented by the numerical values of views, likes, subscriptions, the time that singular videos were watched, shares, comments, and the overall number of videos posted by the channel (user). The number of views is the most representative among the other values since it is the one that is always reported, independently of the will of the channel owner. The analysis based on this value needs to take in account also

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<sup>13</sup> There might also be other jihadi videos that promote jihadism, but that do not show up through conducting searches by keywords. The purpose here is to analyze only those videos that promote the jihad and that do it as publicly as possible.

<sup>14</sup> A copy of the dataset is provided by the author to the NPS CORE Lab and it may be released by request for free. Contact the NPS Core Lab at: <http://www.npscorelab.com/>.

the time factor. Videos that have been online for a longer time have had more chances to become more popular than others, thus it is needed to normalize these values. Thus, we divide the number of views by the number of days the video has been online and obtain a derivate value that represents the views per day of each video (see Table 3).

Ranking	Ordering by number of views regardless of the time being online		Ordering by the number of views per day		
	Video <sup>15</sup>	Views	Video	Views	Views/day
1	***nah_1	41622	***nal_1	14974	365.2
2	***dii_3	39386	***l1m_2	29069	363.4
3	***l1m_2	29069	***ter_1	9008	214.5
4	***HGT_1	23759	***nah_1	41622	165.8
5	***nal_1	14974	***jda_1	5003	142.9

Table 3. The five most popular (in terms of number of views and number of views/day) jihadi information operations from the dataset.

As noted in Table 3 the videos resulting in the “Top-5” in the two orderings are either different or rank differently. In order to have a complete overview of the most popular jihadi information operations in the dataset there is needed to describe them briefly. The description is based on the data found within the dataset.

The video “\*\*\*nah\_1,” ranking first in the ordering by the number of views, is a recently posted (March 2013) video showing an Albanian mujahedeen in Syria among other foreign mujahedeen fighters. The video performance in terms of the quantity and outreach element measures is above the average. It is also the most watched<sup>16</sup> (time watched calculated in hours), the most commented (383 comments), and it contains a

<sup>15</sup> The identification of videos is altered on purpose. The unaltered version of the identification of the videos is found in the dataset, which can be requested from the NPS CORE Lab.

<sup>16</sup> Considered from among the videos, for which this measure was made possible for public consultation. Information about this measure is made available to the public at the channel owner’s discretion.

hyperlink (encouraging the public to connect through a Facebook profile). On the other hand, it is of a poor audiovisual quality

The third (\*\*11m\_2) and the fifth (\*\*nal\_1) videos are quite similar to the first in ranking except for the lower number of views and the audiovisual quality. They are also recent and relate to the jihad in Syria. The number of comments generated on these videos is above the average. As mentioned previously these videos are of a higher audiovisual quality and they are both branded.

The second (\*\*dii\_3) and the fourth (\*\*HGT\_1) videos have a few differences from the other three videos. They are quite old (dating back respectively to March 2009, and February 2007) and they are related to a general perspective of the jihad. The second video also provides a hyperlink for the public and it is branded by an audiovisual editing studio identified with an Albanian name. The fourth video has fewer elements of success (networking, local signs, and audiovisual quality).

The ranking, with the ordering by the number of views per day, is slightly different from the first ranking. The three Syria-related videos from the first ordering are still present and the video ranking first is a video portraying an Albanian mujahedeen calling in Albanian for joining the jihad in Syria. As to this ordering all the videos are related to the Syrian jihad, and in terms of elements of success, these videos more closely follow the recommendations of prominent jihadi leaders in terms of showing local affiliations. The quantity and outreach measures perform better and their values are beyond the average of the measures of the whole dataset, and the audiovisual quality measures are almost at top levels. All the videos are quite recent, with the oldest dating back to March 2013, the most recent from October 2013. The performance of these videos in terms of quantity and outreach not only shows a predisposition of videos promoting the joining of jihad in Syria being the most popular, but it also shows that the participation of Albanians in the Syrian jihad is also backed by successful jihadi information operations online.

Other observations from the analysis of the first element's measures that certify the prominent jihadis' recommendations are the results of some simple regression analysis. The measures put to analysis are the number of subscriptions (general) and the

number of videos posted (general) by the channel. The number of subscriptions is better than the number of views as a measure of the potential success of a jihadi campaign as viewers (from the perspective of YouTube) may be also individuals who occasionally wander into the Web and continuously check the content without paying a lot of attention to it. Subscribers are more committed to the contents that are posted by selected channels. A subscriber is interested in the type of videos posted by a selected channel. In this case there is a high positive correlation between those measures, a correlation value of 0.7188. In simple words the more the videos are uploaded by the channel the higher the number of subscriptions.

By increasing the number of subscribers, channels have more opportunities to tailor their messages toward influencing their subscribers' opinions. It is mentioned earlier that jihadi activists on the Internet do not come out as fully-fledged al Qaeda supporters; rather they carefully reveal their messages, by including also general religious narratives. The same can be said about the channels that are part of the dataset. Through a quick overview, some of these channels contain more videos that can hardly be classified as jihadi information operations. But that may be part of the jihadi information strategy. YouTube users can be attracted by general Islamic videos, which make them subscribe to a channel that later exposes them jihadi videos. The exposure is guaranteed since the subscription mechanism enables the promotion of videos aired by subscribed channels first, and then other videos.

Another regression that certifies the quantity and outreach recommendation is the one that analyzes the number of views measure with the number of days online of the videos. The correlation is positive and its value is 0.2407. In simple words, the longer a video stays online, the greater the number of times it will be seen by general users. The number of communications is not the only factor that increases popularity of the jihadi cause; the stable presence of the message among the public is also important. The Internet provides an excellent depository for jihadi messages, and social networking sites make it even easier than the traditional Web to encounter those types of messages.

The testing of the second recommendation, the networking for jihad, represents a difficult task. On the other hand, research on the networking elements, can be very profitable in terms of identifying and targeting for further research elements of the dataset. The analysis here incorporates also with the third recommendation element, the localization of the jihad.

Figure 3 shows the connection of YouTube users (commenting) on the respective videos, which are colored by the topic they promote. As mentioned earlier very interactive users (those who comment in two or more videos) can be identified immediately and targeted for further research. Users of this type may be also identified as very interactive and very competent interactive users, in the case they comment on videos promoting different topics. The sociogram presented in Figure 3 contains some of these individuals. For the purpose of this study there is no need to conduct further analysis on these users, but the possibility of extending the research is feasible. By processing the networking and localization elements through SNA software and methodologies it is possible to conduct further analysis and obtain relative results that may serve beyond the purpose of simply measuring success and failure of jihadi information operations on the social networking sites.



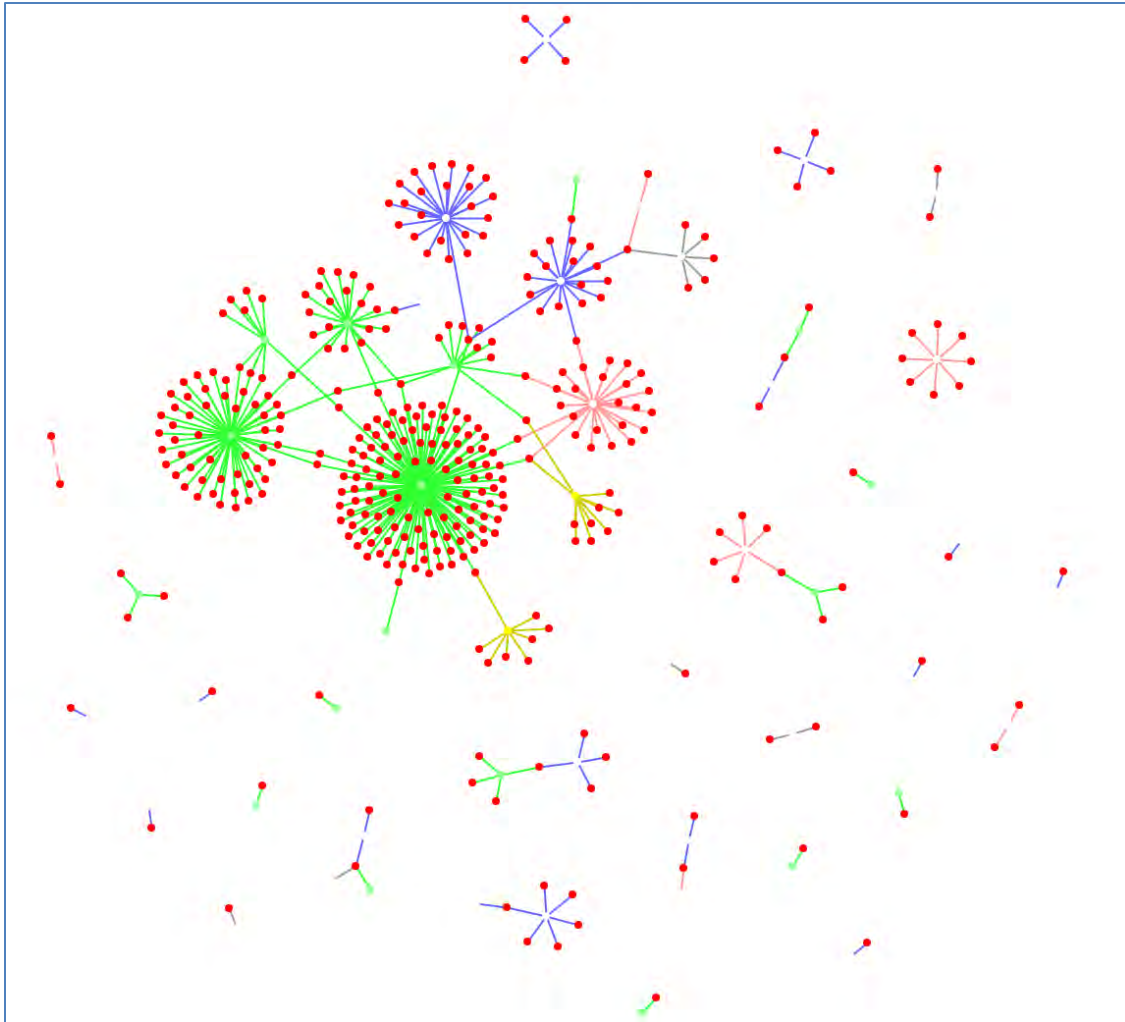


Figure 3. Visualization obtained through ORA Network Visualizer. The visualization represents the network of interacting users (commenters) and the jihadi information operations which are colored by subject. (Afghanistan/Iraq in grey; general call to jihad in dark purple; jihadi leaders in peach; Syrian conflict in green; and West vs. Islam in yellow).

The following figure (Figure 4) shows that the majority of jihadi information operations are related to subjects such as the general call to jihad and the Syrian conflict. From an Albanian perspective this subject-based setup of jihadi information operations are not in the least concurrent with local narratives. The small number of videos on the Afghanistan/Iraq jihadi campaigns cannot be larger since the countries share almost nothing in common and the geographic distance makes it even harder to make the cause compelling to Albanians. The same applies to the West vs. Islam videos. Albanians are

very pro-Western and it is hard to change the narratives on that perspective. A different situation is presented by the large number of videos promoting jihadism in general and also the joining of the jihad in Syria.

Similar to the previous visualization it is possible to identify special “actors” within this sociogram. In this case, the users would be channel owners and the very proactive ones would be those who have uploaded two or more videos. Moreover, the highly competent ones would be the channel owners who have posted videos on two or more subjects. YouTube channel owners with these characteristics can be easily spotted from the sociogram.

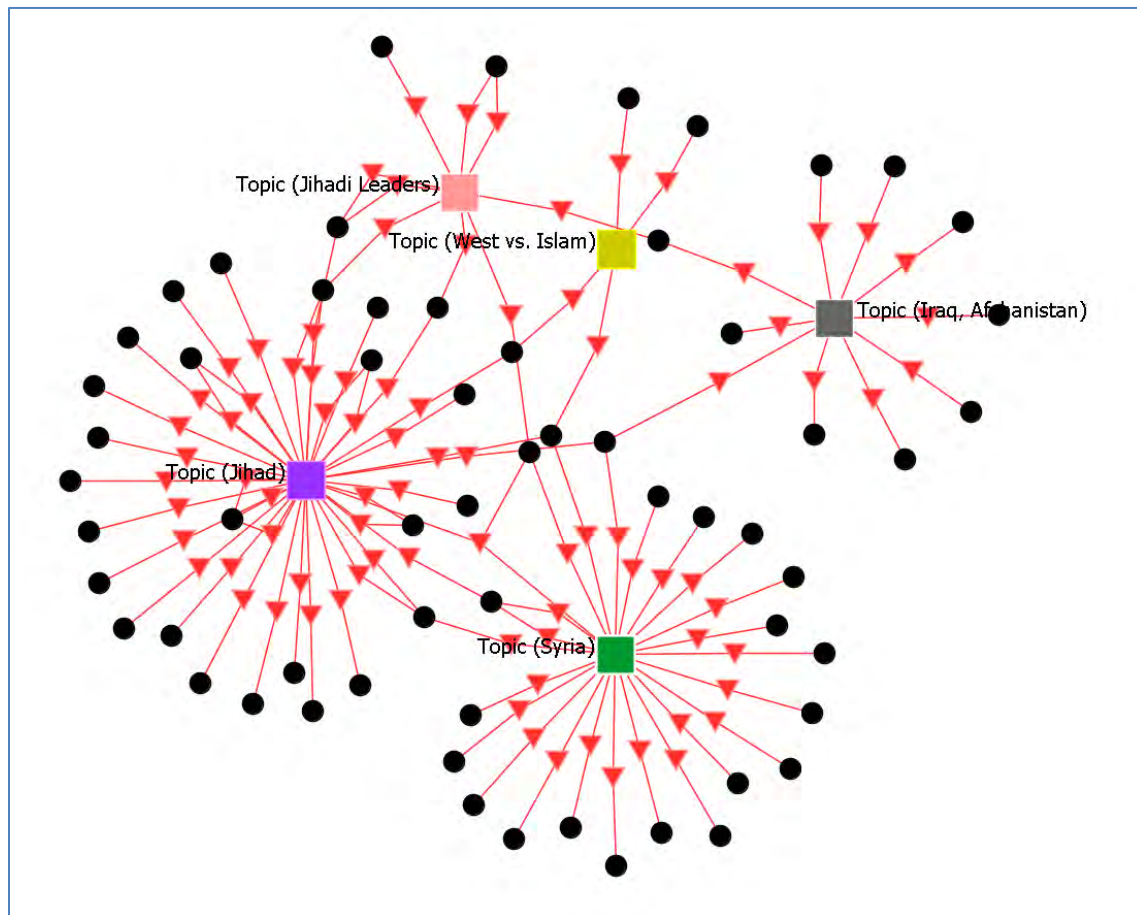


Figure 4. Visualization obtained through ORA Network Visualizer. The triangles (red) represent the jihadi information operations, the squares (by color) the class of topic which they address, and the circles (black) the channel owners.

As in the previous case, after special “actors” have been identified they can be targeted for further research and analysis.

The last recommended element, the audiovisual effect, is tested through regression analysis, and by taking the number of views, and the number of views per day values as independent variables, while the editing quality and audiovisual quality measures are taken as dependent variables. The results show that both sets of correlations are positive and quite statistically significant<sup>17</sup>; that is, if the videos are better edited (with more local features) and are of a better audiovisual quality, the number of views and average views per day is expected to be higher.

In conclusion it may be asserted that the prominent jihadi leaders recommendations on how to conduct the jihad on the Internet more effectively are valid and important. At this point the recommended elements become tested factors of success of jihadi information operations. By contrast, disregarding these recommendations may result in a failure of the jihadi information operations, especially on the social networking sites.

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<sup>17</sup> The correlation value between the views per day and the editing quality is 0.4253, and the correlation value between the views per day and the audiovisual quality is 0.2656.

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## **VI. COMBINED SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNTERING JIHADI INFORMATION OPERATIONS ON THE INTERNET**

### **A. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Jihadis will continue to use the Internet as their primary tool for conducting information operations. The transitioning from the use of Web 1.0 to the use of Web 2.0 applications may be slow but it is inevitable; that is because jihadis need to reach the wider public independently, whether they successfully influence it or not. In approaching social networking sites jihadis face problems associated with the lack of knowledge of how to exploit them, but also with the restrictions applied by counterterrorism bodies. By raising popularity scores on the Web, jihadis may attract the attention of counterterrorist forces. The lack of a centralized information management structure contributes to a further degradation of jihadi information operations on the Web. With the al Qaeda leadership being hunted and cracked down on there is no sign of a potential reestablishment of the information management structure as it existed in the pre-9/11 era. The future of jihadi information operations belongs to lone jihadis or smaller disconnected groups of individuals. From a counterterrorist perspective the decentralized (or leaderless) jihad presents new challenges, especially in the information management and intelligence gathering fields. Jihadi activists on the Internet may exploit the opportunities offered by the Internet without any significant restrictions. In a scenario where counterterrorist forces have no means to control the information flow on the Internet, the jihadists may be at an advantage. Still the advantages are proportionally related to the portion of the wider public that makes use of the Internet. As societies go digital counterterrorist forces can also develop capabilities to counter threats coming from the Internet. While a scenario where everything that goes online passes through diligent security and counterterrorist checks is not feasible in the short term, counterterrorist forces need to develop alternative capabilities to exert a limited but meaningful control over what goes on the Web.

The identification of factors of success of jihadi information operations on social networking sites attempts to provide to counterterrorist forces a tool to distinguish important and potentially important jihadi information operations from among the vast amount of jihadi-inspired Web spaces. Besides the identification of the factors of success, within the thesis is found also a methodology that guides researchers and analysts in building their own datasets, with which the prominent jihadis recommendations on the conduct of the information campaign can be put to the test. In this study the four elements framed in accordance with the recommendations of prominent jihadis were tested and found to be valid, and as such, they are proven factors.

The quantity and outreach factor emphasizes that the more jihadis communicate and attempt to reach the public, the wider is their impact in terms of public attention driven toward their communication.

The networking factor highlights that networked efforts contribute to a better distribution and larger publicity to jihadi information operations.

The specific tailoring factor emphasizes that jihadi information operations need to be shaped to the public they attempt to influence. Forwarding messages in the right language with local symbols and matching the local narrative makes these messages perform better in terms of public attraction.

The audiovisual exploitation factor highlights that better edited and a better audiovisual quality of the messages makes jihadi information operations more popular.

These factors may also serve for different purposes, starting from the assessment of jihadi information strategies, to the identification of key jihadi Web activists, who can be closely monitored and targeted by counterterrorist forces. By assessing jihadi information strategies on the Internet counterterrorist forces may also plan and conduct counteractions with the purpose of extending the collection of intelligence, rather than simply shutting these Web spaces down.

## **B. OPTIONS FOR COUNTERING JIHADI INFORMATION OPERATIONS ON THE INTERNET**

The Internet would be safer without jihadi information operations, but it would also be also useless for obtaining intelligence about jihadi information strategies. Between the total absence and the undisturbed presence there is a wide array of options, which allow counterterrorist agencies to increase their chances for intelligence collection, while simultaneously countering the jihadi presence on the Web. The options should be shaped in line with the concept of noise in communication processes, which was interpreted from a counter jihadism perspective by Weimann and Von Knop (2008). Practically, counterterrorism bodies should interfere in the communication between terrorist and the public, by applying various actions, ranging from the countering of narratives to the shutting down of terrorist websites (p. 891–892). The shutting down option, of course, does not provide a terminal solution to jihadism on the Web. Instead, what may be more beneficial is applying strategies for continuous collection of intelligence on the uses of the Internet by jihadis. Berger (2013) also observes in regard to the challenge of countering jihadism on the Internet, “the strategy doesn’t have to be an all-or-nothing proposition.”

Below there are some options available to the counterterrorist agencies for exercising pressure on jihadist Web spaces in order to obtain better and fresher intelligence:

- Controlled shutdown of websites, social networking sites accounts, pages, etc.: This option calls for a controlled shutdown of terrorist spaces on the Web in order to scatter a reappearance, which would generate fresh intelligence. Berger (2013) cites the case of the manipulation of Twitter accounts of terrorist groups in order to diminish their respective followers. He describes the take-down and resurgence of the al-Shabab Twitter account. The result was that the number of the followers of that account was reduced meaningfully. As to Berger, that experience provides a positive feedback, since it may allow counterterrorist bodies first to make terrorists less influential, and second, to obtain better intelligence, given the reduced number of followers, who may be considered as interested subjects with similar goals and beliefs to those of the terrorists.

- Inducing fear to discover the fearless and the fearsome: This option calls for distribution of false statements on potential infiltration of counterterrorist forces on the jihad Web space. That would be followed by close monitoring of the Web space in order to analyze the generated result.
- Cyber-herding: This option reflects the strategy developed by Moon (2007). The strategy is called cyber-herding and refers to “the action by which an individual, group, or organization drives individuals, groups, or organizations to a desired location within the electronic realm.” The strategy is based on the ambiguity of the Internet, and the weakness of trust-development of it. As Moon explains, “cyber-herding has the potential to covertly neutralize undesirable websites, mine data from controlled websites, map virtual social networks, manipulate extremist websites, and manipulate the extremist’s story.” Moon also forwards an action plan, by identifying structures and phases for the take-down of extremist websites.
- Promotion of counterviews or deceptive Web spaces: This option calls for an assisted promotion of Web spaces that participate in the Web jihad with a softer “voice” or that increases discrepancies between jihadis. This option may resonate a sort of “divide and conquer” type of strategy.
- Creating honeypots: This option calls for the creation of honeypot spaces (carefully managed Web spaces that allow Web space managers to identify the visiting users by retrieving their IP addresses) in order to gather digital information on the interested users.
- Spreading viruses or worms in jihadi websites: This option calls for introducing computer viruses or worms in jihadi Web spaces in order to cause damage or enable the infiltration of the jihadist computers. Kaste (2012) describes a virus called “Flame” which enables intelligence collecting through individual computers previously infected.
- Exploiting Web space codes of conduct: Every social networking site has rules regarding the posting of content by users. These postings should not contain audiovisual material that promote the violation of human rights, are disrespectful, or against the law. The identification of irregular postings may be flagged by counterterrorist users in order to trigger action by site managers, especially in the case of social networking sites.
- Using counterterrorist branded messages: This option calls for inducing branded messages from counterterrorist users on jihadi Web spaces in order to acknowledge jihadis for an ongoing intelligence gathering operation. The option is based on the practice of police lights and sirens in dangerous urban areas, an appliance which causes a stall and silence during the presence of the lights and sirens. As Arquilla and Rondfeldt (2009) maintain, “if our enemies came to see cyberspace as insecure, they would probably flee the virtual domain” (p. 63).



These options should aim toward enabling counter terrorist forces to gather more information in order to shape better strategies to counter jihadism on the Web and on the ground. Information is very precious for both parts, but at the end only the ones who exploit it better will win the war.

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## APPENDIX A

Religious affiliation	Albania (2012)	Kosovo (2011)	Macedonia (2002)	Bosnia (2013)	Montenegro (2013)
<b>Population</b>	<b>2,800,138</b>	<b>1,739,825</b>	<b>2,022,547</b>	<b>3,879,296</b>	<b>620,029</b>
Muslims	58.79 %	95.6 %	33.33 %	40 %	19.1 %
Catholics	10.24 %	2.2 %	0.34 %	15 %	3.4 %
Christian Orthodox	6.75 %	1.4 %	64.78 %	31 %	72 %
Believers w/o den.	5.49 %	-	-	-	-
Atheists	2.50 %	-	-	-	1.2 %
Others	0.02 %	0.1 %	1.55 %	14 %	1.7 %
No answer/No relevant	16.33 %	0.6 %	-	-	2.6 %

Table 4. Statistics on religion in Balkan countries.

Country Rank	Regional Rank	Country	CPI 2012 Score
62	1	Croatia	46
69	2	Macedonia	43
72	3	Bosnia and Herzegovina	42
75	4	Montenegro	41
80	5	Serbia	39
105	6	Kosovo	34
113	7	Albania	33

Table 5. The South East Europe (SEE) countries Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2012. In the global chart Denmark was positioned first with 90 points and Somalia as last with 174 points (from Transparency International, 2013)

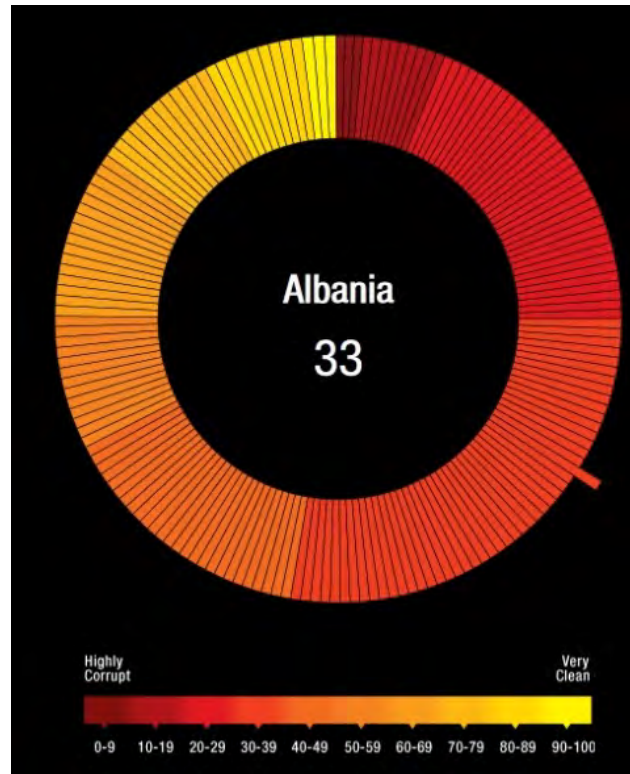


Figure 5. Albania's score in the TI, CPI 2012. (Transparency International, 2013)

<b>NGO/Charity/Religious Organization</b>	<b>Links with terrorist organizations</b>	<b>Links with individuals in Albania</b>	<b>Inspiration and period of activity in Albania</b>
International Humanitarian Islamic Organization (IIRO)	Islamic Algerian Armed Group (GIA) Algerian Islamic Front Bosnian Mujahedeen	Muhammad al-Zawahiry	Wahhabi, 1990–2002
Al Haramain Foundation	Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) Al Qaeda (AQ)	Ahmad Ibrahim al-Sayyid al-Naggar, Egyptian Mohamed Hasan Mahmoud Hassan (aka Abu Omar), Egyptian Shawki Attiya, Egyptian Artan Kristo (aka Muhamed Abdullahi), Albanian	Wahhabi, 1992–2002, 2005
World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY)	Muslim Brotherhood Al Qaeda EIJ GIA Hamas FIS Bosnian Jihad	Ahmed Hassan Rabie Ayman Mohamed Mahmoud Khalaf Mezrag Boufaldja (aka Abdyl Gani), Algerian Abdul Naem, Iraqi Muem Naem, Iraqi	Wahhabi, 1992–2000
Taibah International (later Jeta)			Salafi, 1993–2002, 2005
Global Relief Foundation (GRF) (aka Secours Mondial)			?–2005
Ayatollah Khomeini Society			1991–2002
Al-Furqan			?–2002

Table 6. Islamic organizations in Albania linked with terrorism (from Kullolli, 2009)

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## APPENDIX B

### Visual Analytics representations on Islamic organizations and terrorist attacks in the Balkans

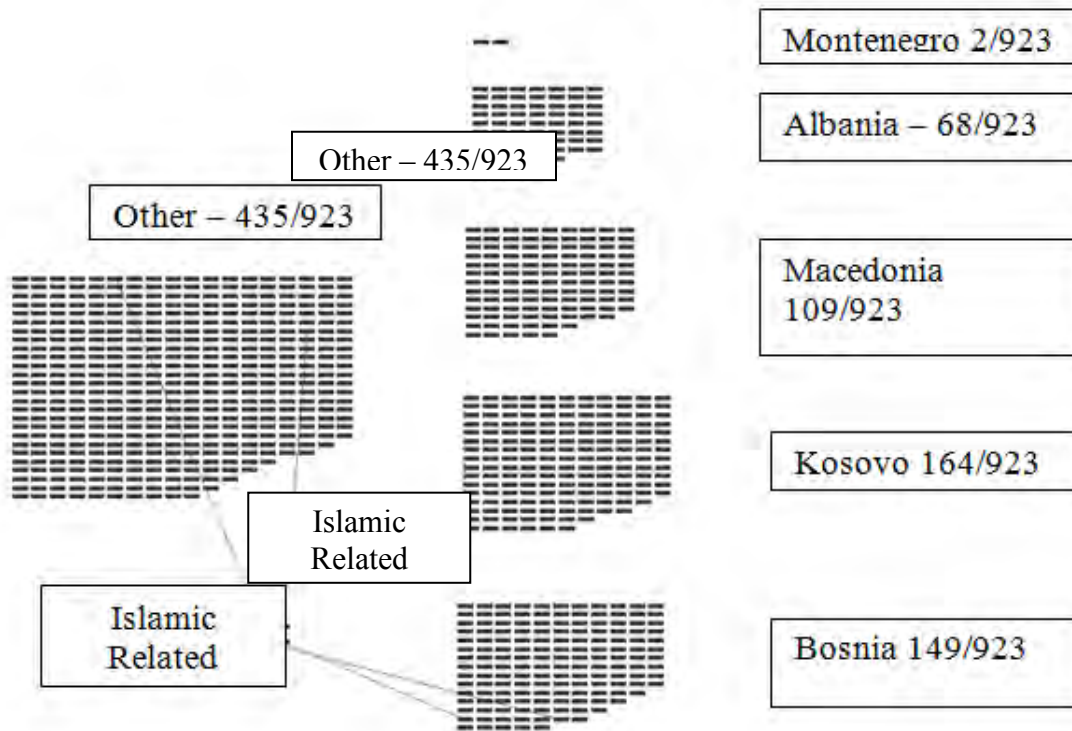


Figure 6. GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir's grid view. The terrorist attacks in Albania, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo, from 1991–2011, extracted from the amount of terrorist attacks that occurred in the Balkan. The attacks that were perpetrated by Islamic-related groups who were identified as attackers have occurred only in Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, and Hungary; nevertheless most of the attackers are not identified properly. See Figure 7 for proper explanation.

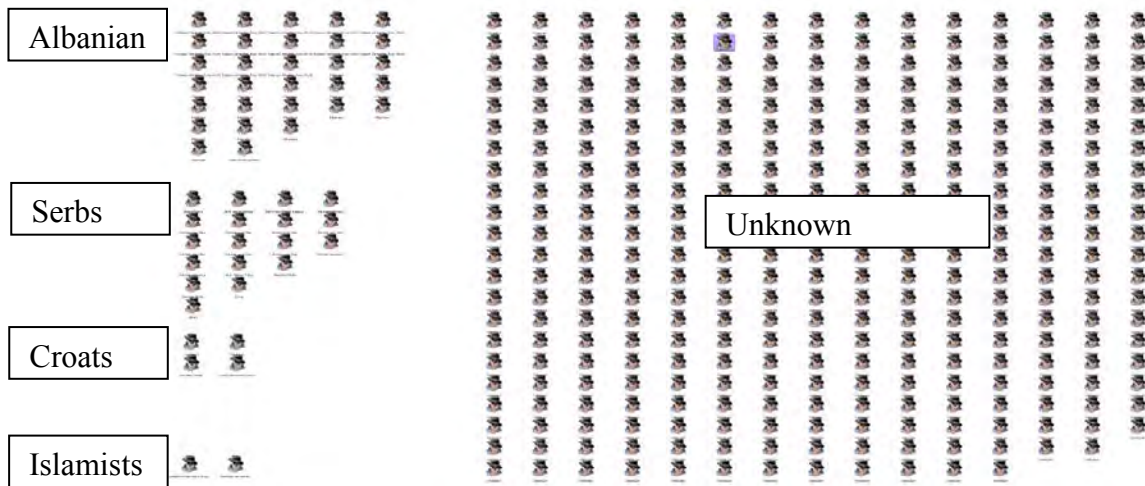


Figure 7. GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir's grid view. The terrorist attacks of unidentified perpetrators in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Albania, divided by their affiliation. See Figure 8 for a temporal distribution of the attacks.

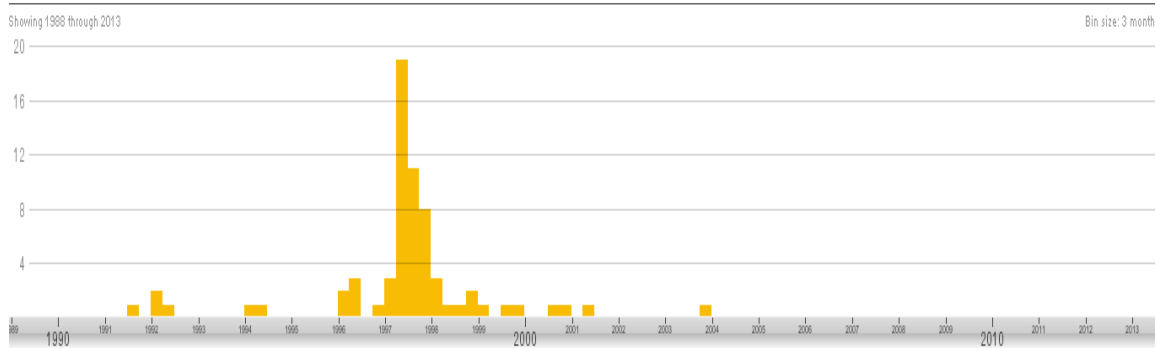


Figure 8. GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir's Timeline view. The terrorist attacks occurred in Albania from 1990–2011. The peak coincides with the year 1997, when Albania faced civil disorders due to Ponzi scheme failures.



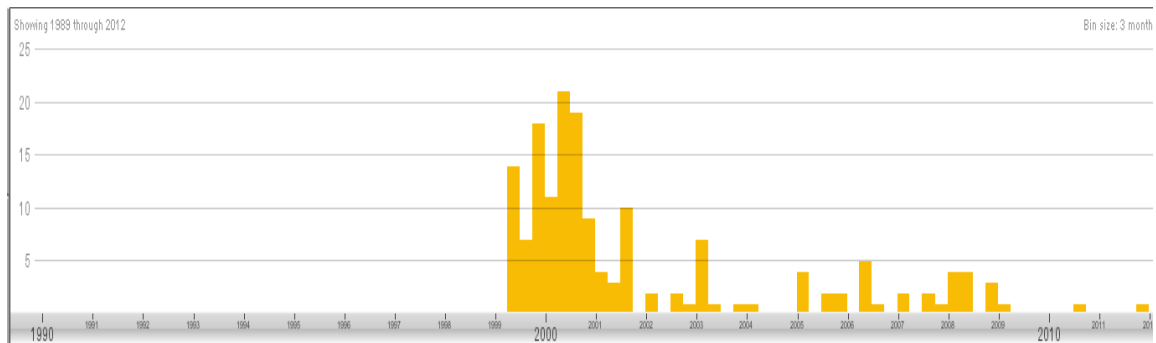


Figure 9. GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir's Timeline view. The terrorist attacks occurred in Kosovo from 1990–2011. The peak coincides with the years 1999–2001, when the Kosovo Albanian started the war against Serbian authorities requesting independence. Although a United Nations-mandated international military contingent occupied the strategic areas, since June 1999 after Serbian Army retreated from the province, in attempt to establish a buffer zone between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians, the attacks continued by ethnic paramilitary groups of both sides.

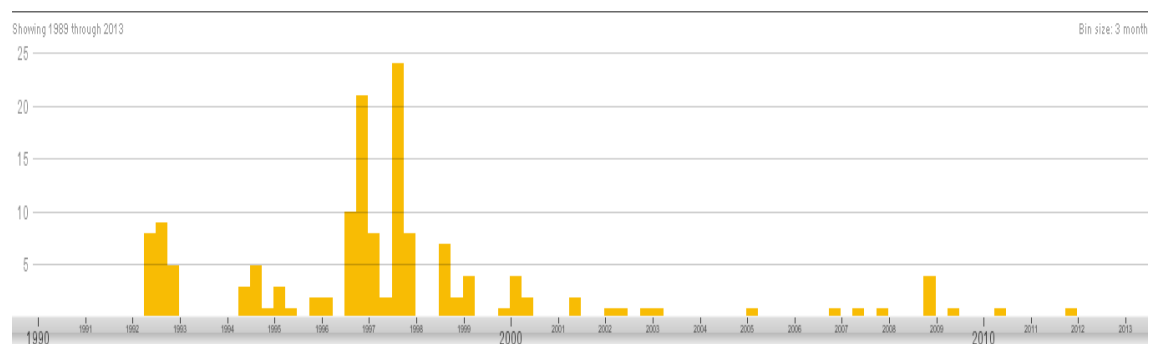


Figure 10. GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir's Timeline view. The terrorist attacks occurred in Bosnia from 1990–2011. The peak coincides with the years 1992–1998, a period of high tension within the country due to political disagreements and ethnic clashes, despite the war being officially over since 1995, after the signing of the Dayton accords.

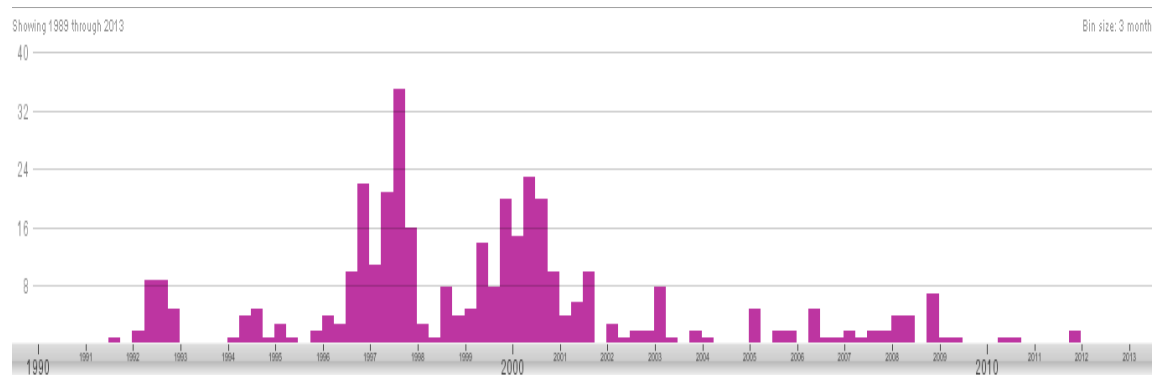


Figure 11. GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir's Timeline view. The terrorist attacks occurred in Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia from 1990–2011.

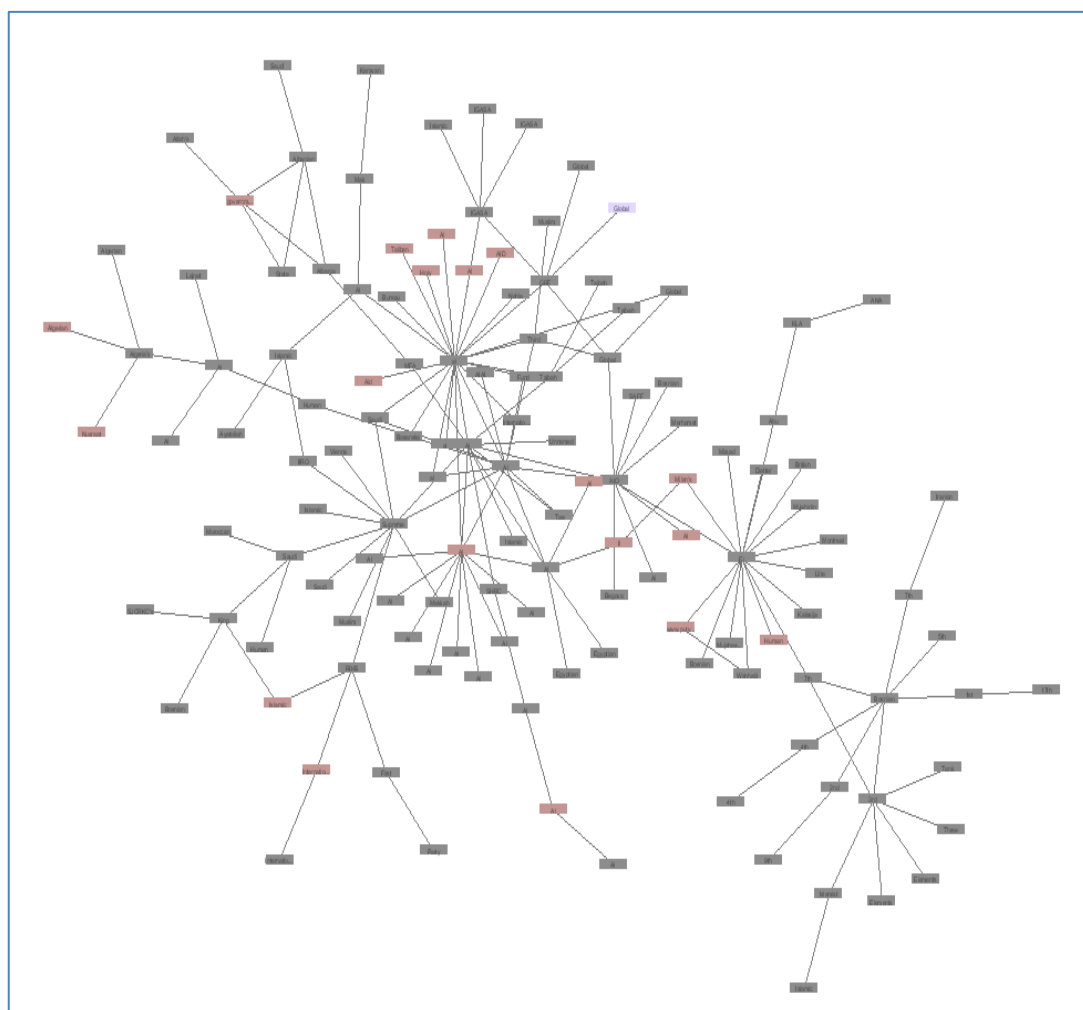


Figure 12. Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's link analysis tool, Auto view. The Balkans Islamic-oriented organization's network, 1992–2004.

<b>Nr.</b>	<b>Betweenness</b>	<b>Closeness</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Eigenvector</b>
<b>1.</b>	Active Islamic Youth (AIO)	Al Haramain in Albania	Al Qaeda	Al Qaeda
<b>2.</b>	Ej Mujahid Brigade	Al Haramain in Bosnia	El Mujahid Brigade	El Mujahid Brigade
<b>3.</b>	Al Haramain in Albania	AIO	Al Haramain International	Al Haramain International
<b>4.</b>	Al Qaeda	Al Qaeda	Al Haramain in Bosnia	Al Haramain in Bosnia
<b>5.</b>	Al Haramain in Bosnia	Al Haramain International	AIO	AIO
<b>6.</b>	Supreme Committee for the Collections of Donations for Bosnia (SCCDB)	SCCDB	SCCDB	Al Haramain in Albania
<b>7.</b>	7 <sup>th</sup> Muslim Liberation Brigade	BIF	Al Haramain Albania	SCCDB
<b>8.</b>	Al Haramain International	Taibah International	3 <sup>rd</sup> Corps BMA	3 <sup>rd</sup> Corps BMA
<b>9.</b>	Bosanska Idealna Futura (BIF)	El Mujahid Brigade	BMA	BMA
<b>10.</b>	Bosnian Muslim Army (BMA)	Al-Gam'at al-Islamiyya	Al-Gam'at al-Islamiyya	Al-Gam'at al-Islamiyya

Figure 13. Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's Social Network Analysis Tool. The centralities of the ten most central Islamic-related organizations in the Balkans.

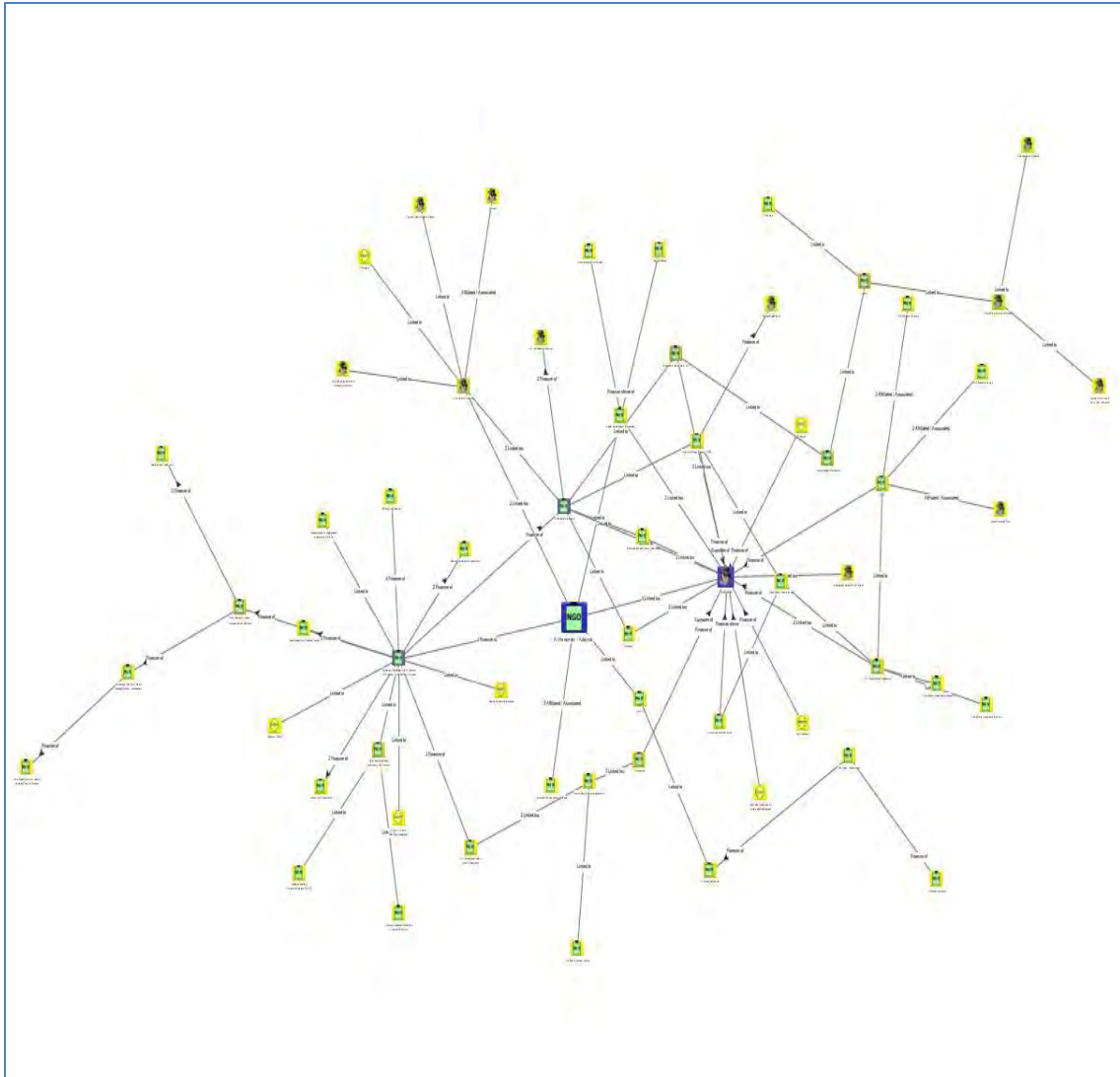


Figure 14. Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's link analysis tool, Auto view. The Balkans Islamic-oriented NGOs, charities, and globally recognized terrorist organizations' network, 1992–2004. See Figure 15 for further explanation on links.



Figure 15. Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's link analysis tool, Histogram. The Balkans Islamic-oriented NGOs, charities, and globally recognized terrorist organizations's network, 1992–2004. The numbers following the entities show the number of links within the network.

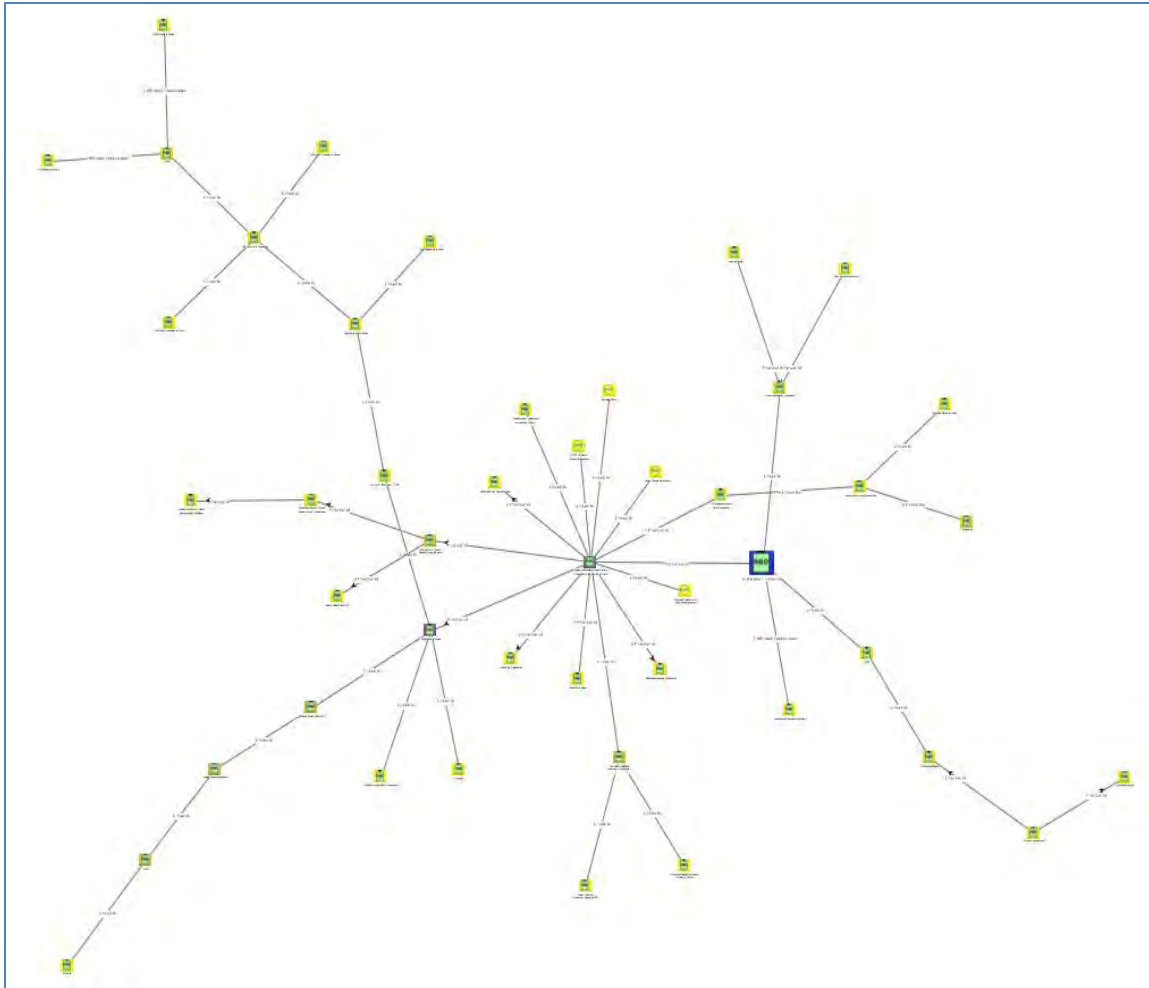


Figure 16. Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's link analysis tool, Auto view. The Balkans Islamic-oriented NGOs and charities network, 1992–2004. See Figure 17 for the importance of each in terms of centrality within the network.

<b>Nr.</b>	<b>Betweenness</b>	<b>Closeness</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Eigenvector</b>
<b>1.</b>	Supreme Committee for the Collections of Donations for Bosnia (SCCDB)	SCCDB	SCCDB	SCCDB
<b>2.</b>	Al Haramain in Bosnia (AHB)	AHB	AHB	AHB
<b>3.</b>	Al Haramain in Albania (AHA)	AHA	Global Relief Foundation (GRF)	AHA
<b>4.</b>	Third World Relief Agency (TWRA)	International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO)	AHA	RIHSB
<b>5.</b>	Gobal Relief Fund in Bosnia	Revival of Islamic Heritage Society in Bosnia (RIHSB)	IGASA/GRFB	GRF/GRFB

Table 7. Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's Social Network Analysis Tool. The centralities of the five most central Islamic NGOs and charities in the Balkans, 1992–2004.

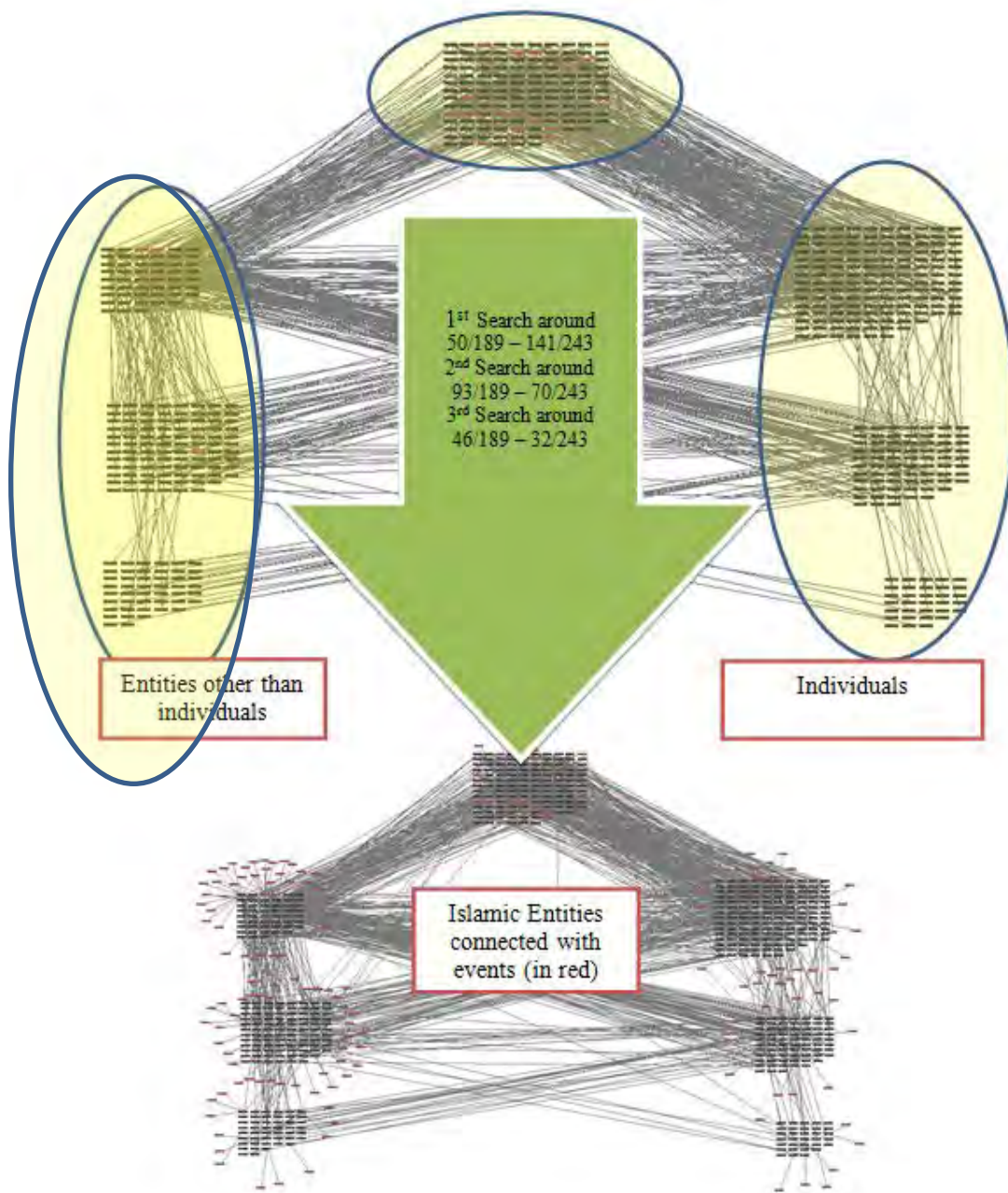


Figure 17. Selected bibliographical sources analyzed through Palantir's link analysis tool, Auto view, and Search Around. The Islamic-related entities, and events in Albania, Bosnia, and Kosovo, 1992–2012. At the top are the Islamic-related organizations, while on the flanks can be found entities connected directly to them. The Search Around feature of Palantir enables phased research. From top to bottom (flanks) are entities connected sequentially with each other. At the bottom there is the same representation, including the events in which the entities are involved.



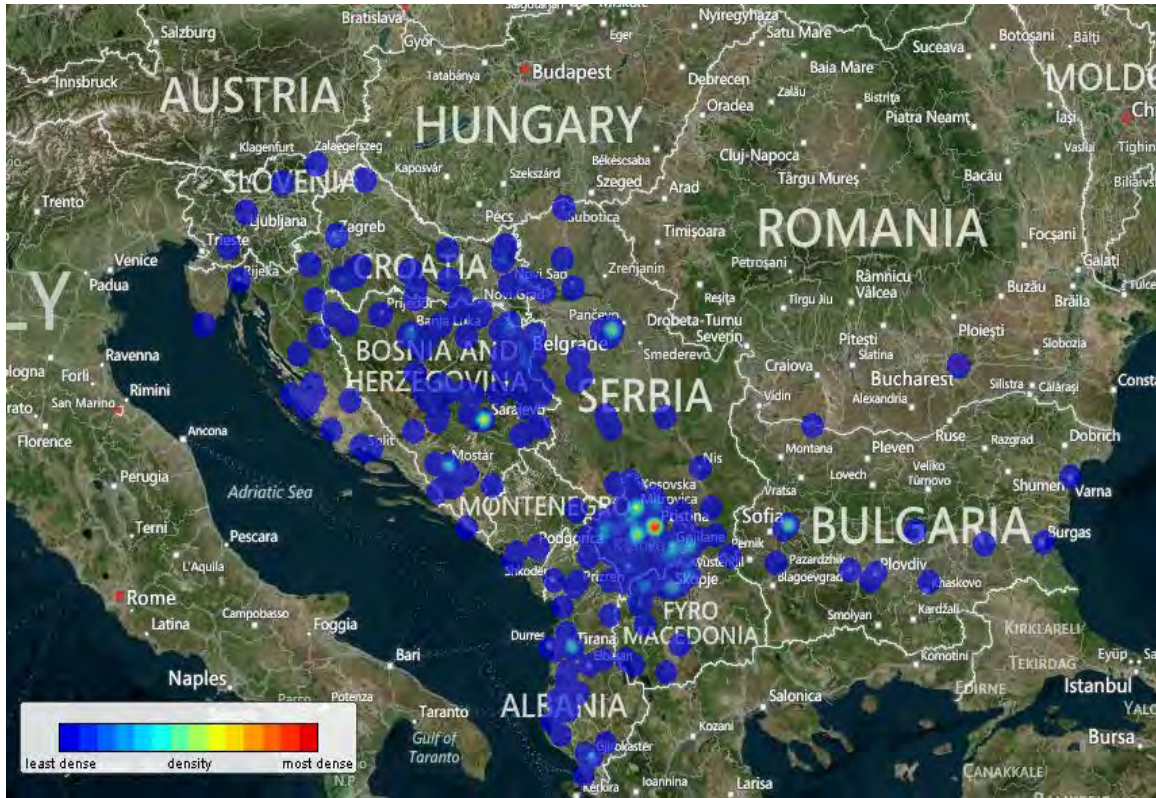


Figure 18. GTD Project Data visualized through Palantir's Map, using the Heatmap Density Tool, with a Radius of 15 km and Area Unit 1 km<sup>2</sup>. The terrorist attacks occurred in Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia from 1990–2011. Note highest density hotspots in Bosnia coincide with the AOR of foreign Islamic paramilitary forces, Zenica in central Bosnia, and Moaca Gornja in the Northeast of the country.

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